

**An archaeological
watching brief of
parkland at Dickens
Heath New Village,
Solihull**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 613
August 2000

An archaeological watching brief of
parkland at Dickens Heath New Village, Solihull

by
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1.0 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out at Dickens Heath New Village at intermittent periods during February, March and July 2000, during the landscaping to create parkland (NGR SP11207585). The West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record (1999) had identified the site as being part of an area of potential archaeological survival. The only visible surface features were the remains of ridge-and-furrow. Three stages of work were monitored, including topsoil stripping for a haul road and for a silt-drying lagoon, and the dredging of a pond. None of these observations revealed any significant archaeological features.

2.0 Introduction

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the creation of parkland for Dickens Heath New Village. The work was carried out in February, March and July 2000 on behalf of the Dickens Heath Consortium. The site is located on land to the north of Braggs Farm Lane, Dickens Heath, Solihull (centred on NGR SP11207585; Fig.1). The surrounding area was undergoing development for low to medium density housing, and the development included landscaping to create an area of parkland. The archaeological watching brief was conducted in accordance with the *Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999) and a method statement prepared by BUFAU (Hughes 1999).

3.0 Archaeological background

It is possible that the moat associated with the former medieval sub-manor site of Aldershaws (recorded on the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record as SMR 9457) was located in the northern part of the proposed parkland area. Another moated site (SMR 1560) lay to the north of the application area and it was believed that associated water features such as ponds may have lain in the northern part of the proposed parkland area. Two existing water features were present in the northern and northwestern part of the development area, which may have been part of this historic system of water management.

3.0 Objectives

The objective of the archaeological work was to obtain an adequate record of any archaeological deposits or finds disturbed or exposed by work associated with the proposals. This objective was achieved through the observation of topsoil and subsoil

disturbance during the landscaping. The development can be considered in three separate stages:

- 1) The excavation of an access/haul road,
- 2) The excavation of a holding/drying lagoon,
- 3) The dredging of the water features.

4.0 Methods

Visits were made to site on an intermittent basis dependent upon the program of works established through consultation with the contractors. All works with potential to disturb archaeological deposits were monitored. Any archaeological features were contextually recorded, supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections, and photographs where appropriate. Records were kept of all observations, even when no archaeological deposits were identified. In addition, a photographic record was kept of all ground disturbance and the surrounding area.

5.0 Results

1) The excavation of the access/haul road

The haul road was excavated in a strip c.3.30m wide to a depth of between 0.3 and 0.4m (the interface between topsoil and subsoil). The subsoil consisted of a yellow clay with occasional patches of gravel and sand. No archaeological features were identified except for areas of deeper topsoil associated with the ridge-and-furrow visible in the field. The ridges were spaced by c.3.5m apart and ran roughly north to south.

2) The excavation of a holding/drying lagoon

The lagoon was excavated to the depth of the interface of topsoil and subsoil (c.0.4m) the subsoil revealed being a yellow/grey clay. No archaeological features were identified other than the remnants of ridge and furrow detailed above.

3) The dredging of the water features

This section of the work was carried out in July 2000, due to earlier logistical problems. The ponds were drained and dredged to a depth of about 4.0m. They were very waterlogged and contained modern dumping material. The extent of waterlogging made the identification of archaeological features very difficult. No features were identified or recorded.

6.0 Conclusions

The only archaeological features observed during this program of work were the remains of ridge-and-furrow, which was likely to have been part of the medieval agrarian landscape. These remains noted as areas of deeper topsoil during excavation for the access/haul road and of the lagoon. No archaeological features were noted during the dredging of the water features, although the degree of waterlogging made any such identification very difficult.

7.0 References

West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record 1999 *Brief for Archaeological Assessment of Proposed Parkland at Dickens Heath New Village, Solihull, West Midlands.*

Hughes, G. 1999 *Dickens Heath New Village, Solihull: parkland, Method Statement for Archaeological Watching Brief.*

Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999 *IFA Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

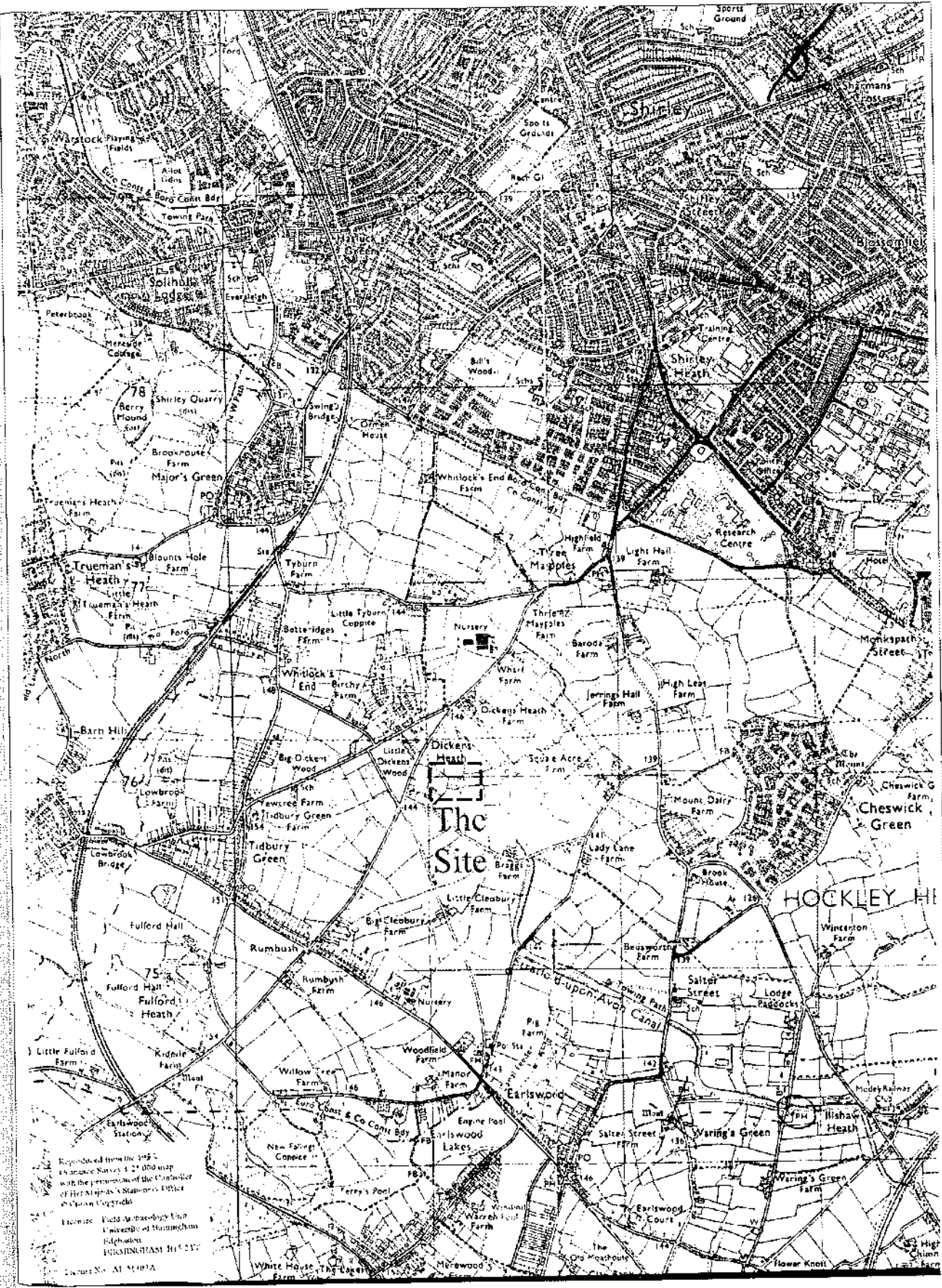
8.0 Acknowledgements

The project was sponsored by The Dickens Heath Consortium. We are grateful to Bradley Kay of EMR Ltd. for his advice and assistance on site, and to Elizabeth Skyrme the landscape architect for Barton Willmore Environmental. The watching brief was undertaken by John Hovey, Gary Coates and Edward Newton. Gwilym Hughes monitored the project. Sarah Watt edited the report and produced the illustrations.

9.0 List of Figures

Fig. 1 Location of site, Ordnance Survey map 1993, 1:25 000

Fig. 2 Location of site from a plan provided by Barton Willmore Environmental



Reproduced from the 1922 Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office London Copyright

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Figure No. M1 9103A

Fig. 1

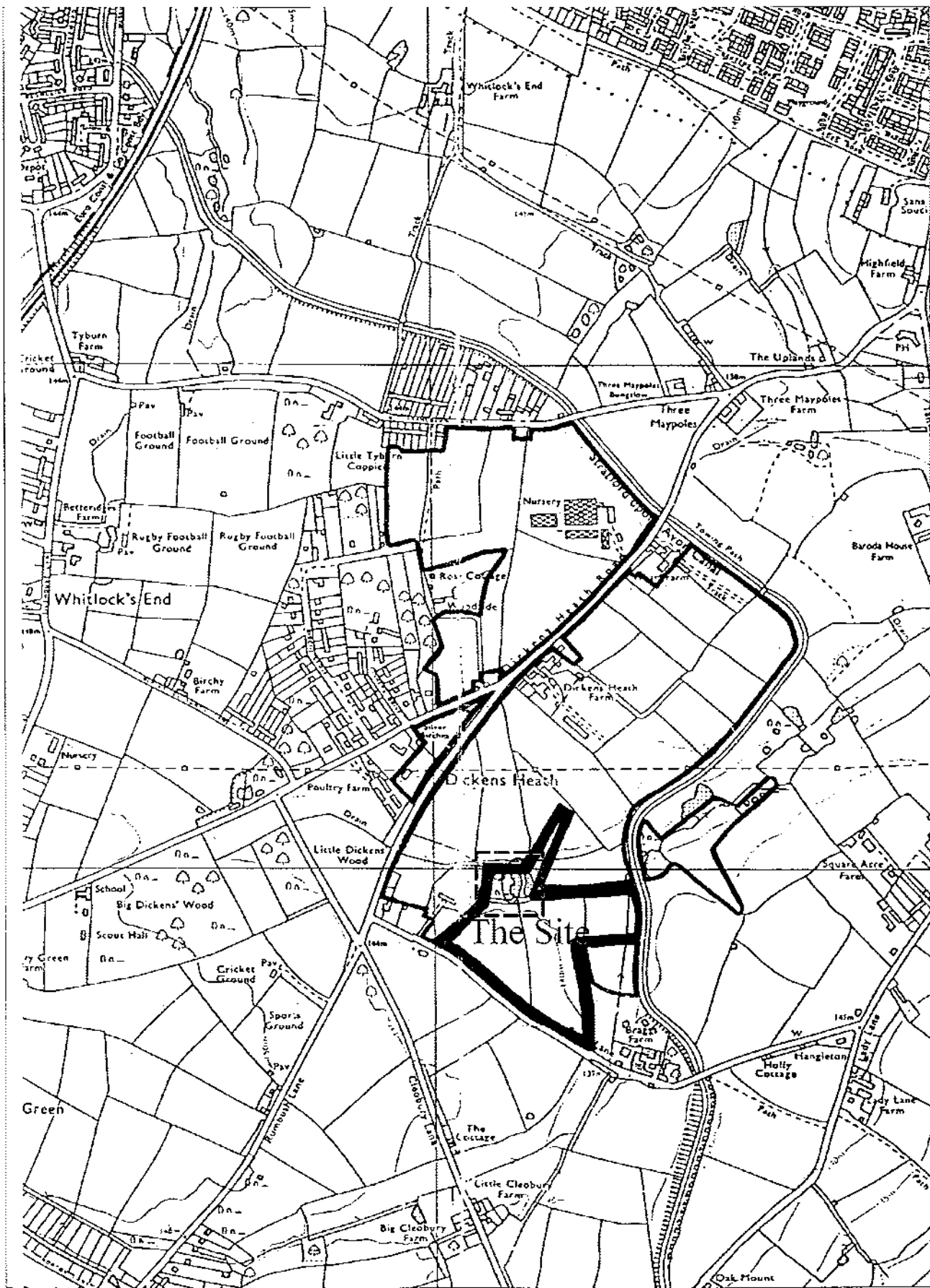


Fig. 2