

**HMP Marchington,
Staffordshire:
an archaeological
watching brief 1999**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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by
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1.0 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on the site of a new prison, accessed from Moreton Lane in Marchington, Staffordshire. Topsoil stripping and extensive landscaping of the site were carried out by the contractors, in preparation for the construction of the prison. No archaeological remains were uncovered during these operations.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken on the site of a new prison, located off Moreton Lane in Marchington, Staffordshire (centred on NGR. SK 147304: Fig.1). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned to carry out the watching brief by Kvaerner Construction Ltd., who were undertaking the construction of the prison on behalf of Premier Custodial Developments. The watching brief followed on from a Stage II Archaeological Desk Based Assessment of the proposed site by RPS Clouston in June 1999 (RPS Clouston 1999), which did not reveal any known archaeology within the boundary of the site.

The purpose of the watching brief was to record any archaeological deposits or features exposed during groundwork on the site. An initial visit to the site was undertaken by an archaeologist on 9th November. A second site visit was made on 24th November in advance of overburden stripping from the eastern lake – the last of four being dug in the development area as part of the landscaping around the prison building.

3.0 Site Location and History

The site of the new prison is located on the southern edge of the River Dove valley, to the north of Moreton Lane and to the east of the village of Marchington (Fig 1). The land under development covers an area of 37 hectares. The underlying geology of the site was investigated by Exploration Associates, who drilled boreholes and dug test pits with a mechanical excavator (Exploration Associates 1999). They reported that the surface layers in the development area were predominantly 'made ground', principally consisting of clay-sand with slag, clinker and gravel inclusions. Underlying these are alluvial deposits of sand and gravel, beneath which is Mercia Mudstone.

The archaeological assessment by RPS Clouston (1999) was unable to uncover evidence for the existence of known archaeology within the boundary of the Marchington prison site, despite the presence of such in the immediate surrounds. The absence of any

currently-visible remains within the development area may be a result of its recent history, a detailed account of which is included in the assessment report. The land to the north of Moreton Lane was utilised by the American army for the construction of a camp and ordnance depot in 1941. This involved the erection of numerous sheds and Nissen-style huts (with interconnecting roadways), plus the laying of railway tracks to form branch lines that connected with the main railway at Sudbury Station. The site was converted into a prisoner-of-war camp in the period immediately following World War II, but was subsequently taken over by the British Army in 1948. Under the latter's ownership the site was used as an RAOC and REMF depot until finally vacated at the end of the 1960s, after which the land was sold back to local farmers. During any or all of these construction phases substantial groundworks, such as topsoil stripping and levelling, may have occurred, thereby masking or obliterating any archaeology then remaining. Any surviving remnants from this military usage of the site were deemed to possess no archaeological significance.

4.0 Methodology

A suitably qualified archaeologist from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit attended the construction site of IIMP Marchington on November 9th and 24th 1999. During the initial visit it was noted that landscaping of the development area to the northwest and east of the proposed course of the prison's perimeter wall was well on the way to completion (Fig.3). This involved the use of mechanical excavators to dig holes for four lakes, going down to the level of the Mercian Mudstone and thereby generating large amounts of gravel spoil. This spoil was then transported to the centre of the site for use in the formation of a raised platform on which the prison buildings would be constructed. On November 24th the archaeologist attended the site to monitor the excavation of the fourth and last lake, located to the east of the prison complex.

5.0 Results and Discussion

The location for the lake at the far northwest of the development area ('L1' on Fig.3) had been dug. The excavation of the second lake to the northwest of the prison complex (L2) was nearing completion. The various geological/makeup layers overlying the alluvial gravel deposits were being removed en-masse by mechanical diggers operating from the sides of the hole. Examination of the strata exposed by the excavation revealed that the uppermost layers comprised gravel (hardcore) and/or concrete, underlain by a brown clay. Such deposits would suggest that this part of the site fell within the confines of one or more of the military establishments previously mentioned.

The lake at the far eastern end of the site ('L4') was at a similar stage to, and being worked in the same manner as, lake L2. Inspection of the exposed strata revealed that this part of the development area had at some time undergone levelling-up by the introduction of sandy-clayey deposits on top of the original surface layer. These deposits were of

variable thickness and contained clinker, gravel and slag, plus fragments of concrete and brick.

In the centre of the development area, work was in progress to construct the raised platform on which the prison complex would be built. This involved the introduction of gravel spoil from the lake excavations, which was then compacted by mechanical rollers.

The archaeologist revisited the site on November 24th, 1999, to inspect work in progress on the excavation of the fourth lake ('L3' on Fig.3). At the time of the visit a sizeable portion of the lake had already been dug, with the method of excavation the same as for lakes L2 and L4. The below-surface strata exposed by the mechanical digger were as described in the geological report by Exploration Associates, referred to above.

However, given the advanced stage of the landscaping; the probably-deleterious impact of previous groundworks (during the military usage of the land) on any archaeology surviving up to 1941; the low archaeological potential of the area as suggested by the lack of records for known archaeology; the high degree of general surface disruption that had already occurred across the site during the current development work, it was deemed unnecessary to alter working practices or to continue with the archaeological watching brief. This decision was achieved in consultation with Mr. C. Welch, the Staffordshire County Archaeologist.

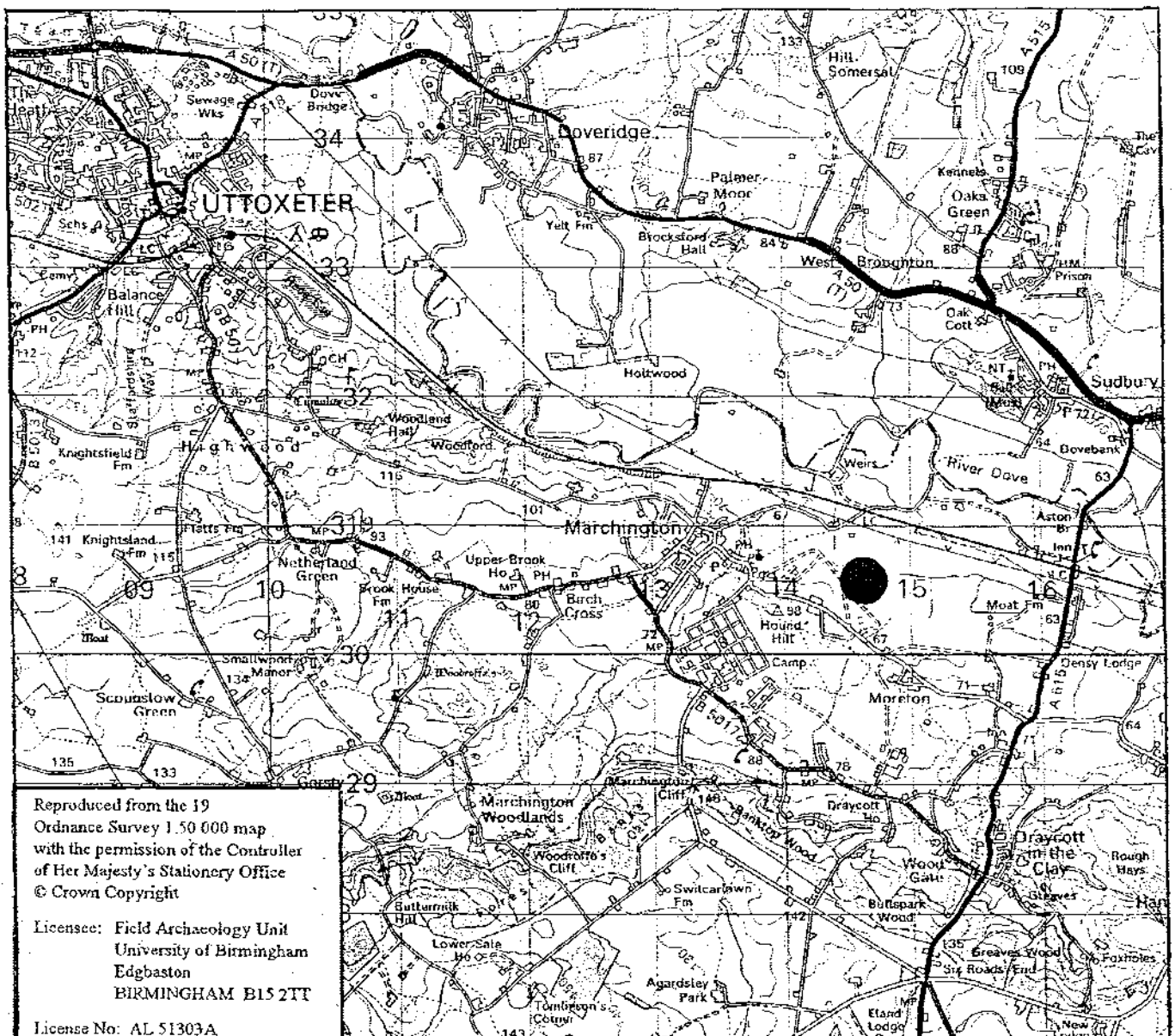
6.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Mr. P. Doshi of Kvacmer Construction Ltd. The project was managed by Simon Buteux and the fieldwork was carried out by Roy Krakowicz.

7.0 References

RPS Clouston 1999 *Land at Marchington Prison, Marchington, Staffordshire. A Stage II Archaeological Desk Based Assessment*. June 1999.

Exploration Associates 1999. *HMP Marchington. Factual Report on Ground Investigation*. 119028. March 1999.



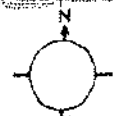
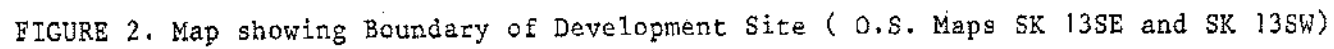
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Site Location.

FIGURE 1. Location of Site of Her Majesty's Prison, Marchington.

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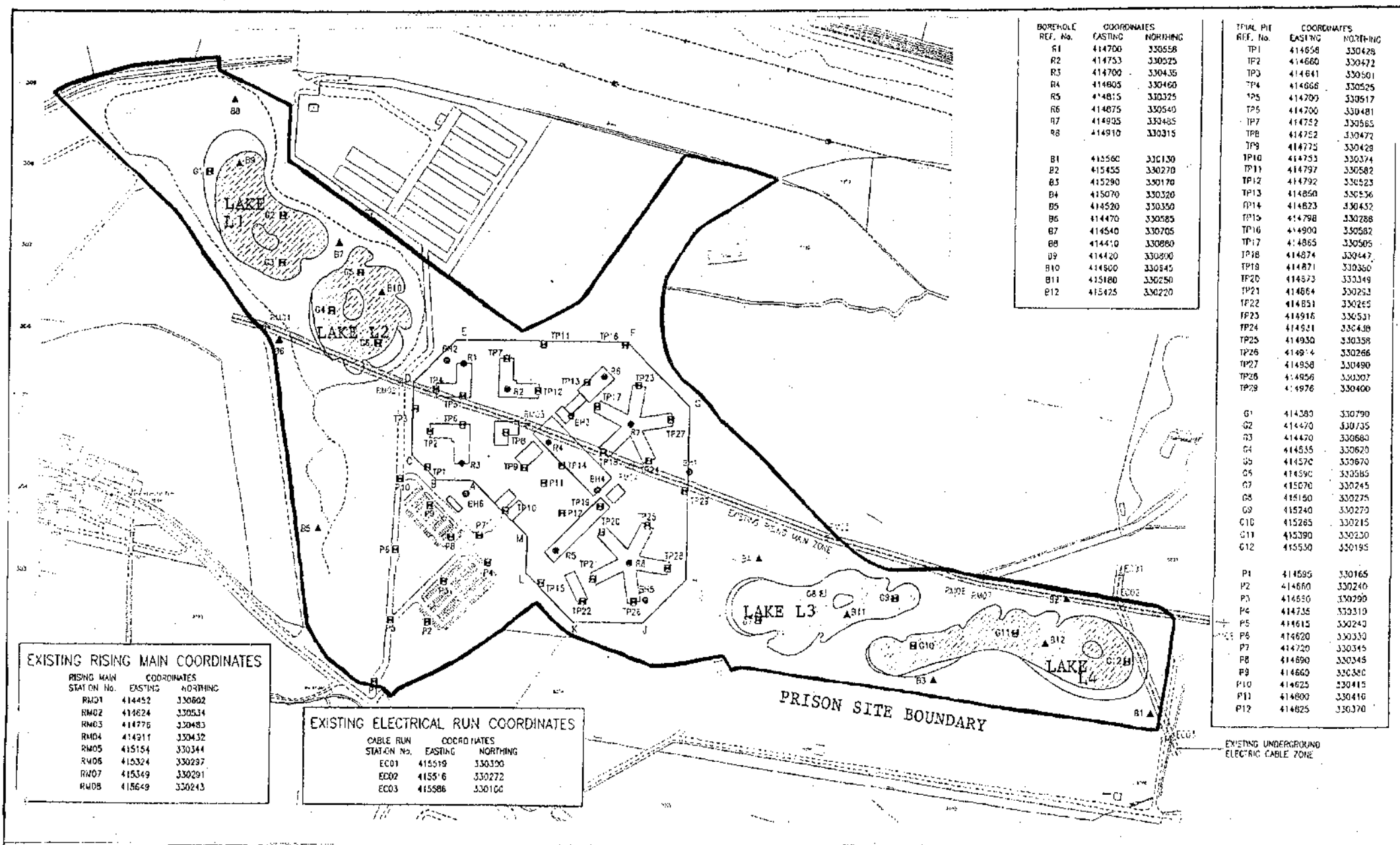


FIGURE 3. Layout of Marchington Prison, taken from Kvaerner Technology Site Plan. Scale 1:2500.

