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An Archaeological Watching Brief at Caisolme,
Barton-under-Needwood, Staffordshire

by
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the construction of an access route through Catholme Farm (NGR SK 196 168) to a development in the north, around Fatholme Farm. An extensive archaeological evaluation had identified a possible prehistoric features in the area associated a complex of multiple, concentric pit circles (SAM 256). The access route followed an existing track and passed close to the pit circles. However, the groundworks were not deep enough to have any impact on any archaeology and no archaeological features or deposits were identified during the watching brief.

Introduction (Fig.1)

This report outlines the results of a watching brief carried out during the construction of an access route and area of hard standing on agricultural land around Catholme Farm, near Barton-under-Needwood, Staffordshire (NGR SK 196 168). The access road was related to a development to the north at Fatholme Farm. It was undertaken to fulfil the conditions of planning permission on the Catholme Farm site itself. The work was commissioned by Phoenix Consulting on behalf of Prorail Ltd. and was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in early December 1999.

Archaeological Background (Fig.1)

The site lies approximately 1.5km to the south-east of the village of Barton-under-Needwood and is bounded to the east by the Birmingham to Derby railway. It lies on a sand and gravel terrace on the west bank of the River Trent just north of its confluence with the River Tame. Information on past settlement and landuse on the gravel terraces of the River Trent has primarily been obtained from aerial photographic survey notably, by Jim Pickering and Rowan Whimster (1989). These surveys have demonstrated extensive and intensive human activity on the gravel terraces since at least the Neolithic (Gaffney and Hughes 1993).

A desk-based study (Richmond 1999) assessed the extent of the known archaeology within and around the potential development area. It included a comprehensive documentary and cartographic survey and a review of previous archaeological work in the immediate area. The remains of three suggested prehistoric sites next to this development have been scheduled as Ancient Monuments (SAM 215, SAM 216 and SAM 256). The easternmost of these sites (SAM 256) is a circular monument comprising multiple concentric circles of pits. It has been suggested that it represents a ceremonial structure, perhaps a complex series of timber circles, of a type well-known throughout Britain dating to the late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age (Gibson 1994). The best known examples of multiple pit circles are found in Wessex and include Woodhenge near to Stonehenge and those in the great henge enclosures of

Durrington Walls and Mount Pleasant. A further cropmarked site to the west comprises a circular enclosure with a series of radiating pits (SAM 215). However, an archaeological evaluation to the west of this site in 1992 failed to identify any archaeological features (Jones 1992). A third scheduled site (SAM 216) lies to the north-west of the site and includes at least one ring ditch and a group of linear features. However, some of the features belonging to this complex which are recorded on the SMR, including a putative cursus, were not identified during the aerial photographic assessment (Cox 1999).

Cropmarked features within the application zone, which were identified during the aerial photographic survey (Cox 1999), included three pit alignments. The trial trenching (Hughes & Coates 1999) identified two of the three pit alignments plotted during the aerial photographic assessment. These alignments might relate to a series of late prehistoric land divisions forming part of a system which also includes the alignment identified on Fatholme Farm to the north. A similar alignment of pits has recently been excavated at Whitmoor Haye approximately 3.5km to the south of Catholme (Coates 1999). Also, a group of linear features in the area between the two scheduled areas (SAM 256 & 215) suggested that features associated with the scheduled monuments may exist outside the scheduled areas. However, these remains were fragmentary and there was no clear evidence relating them in date or function to the scheduled remains.

Method (Fig.2)

The access road and area of hard standing were excavated using a D6 Bulldozer, removing a maximum of 0.3m of topsoil and heaping this topsoil into bunds outside the stripped areas. This groundwork was monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The intention was to sample excavate and record any archaeological features encountered. The stripped route was then rolled, covered with terram and a hard-core surface of crushed stone deposited to form a temporary road surface. The route of the road followed the existing north-south track, mostly adjacent to the modern railway, with an easement of approximately 10m from the existing fenceline. The area of hard standing was approximately triangular in shape at the corner of the new north-south track and existing east-west track.

Results (Fig.2)

The groundwork was not deep enough to penetrate the archaeological deposits. The strip averaged 0.3m deep, whereas the cover of topsoil was over 0.4m deep. No archaeological deposits were observed and no artefacts were identified in the topsoil. The strip encountered areas of stone, the make-up of the existing track and railway, and some deposits of modern brick, which appear to have been patches of track repair.

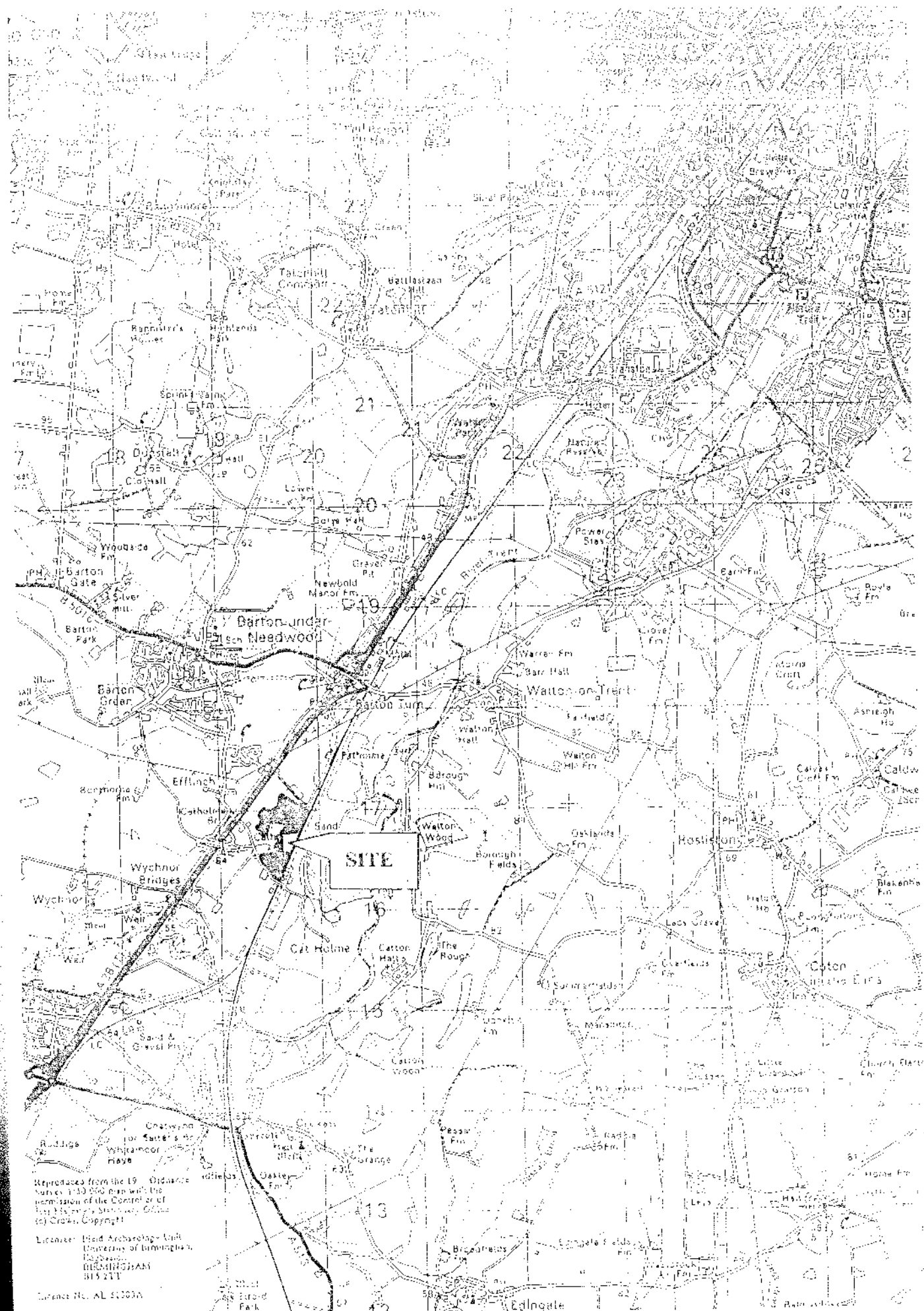
This road construction appeared to have no detrimental effect on any archaeology on the site and it is probable that the use and repair of the track and the construction of the railway line removed any surviving archaeology long before the present stripping.

Acknowledgements

The watching brief was carried out by Gary Coates and the project was managed by Gwilym Hughes, both from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The work was monitored by Andrew Richmond on behalf of Phoenix Consulting and Chris Welch on behalf of Staffordshire County Council. We are also grateful to Brian Warren, the Site Manager for G.T.R.M., the principal contractors, for his assistance and cooperation.

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SITE

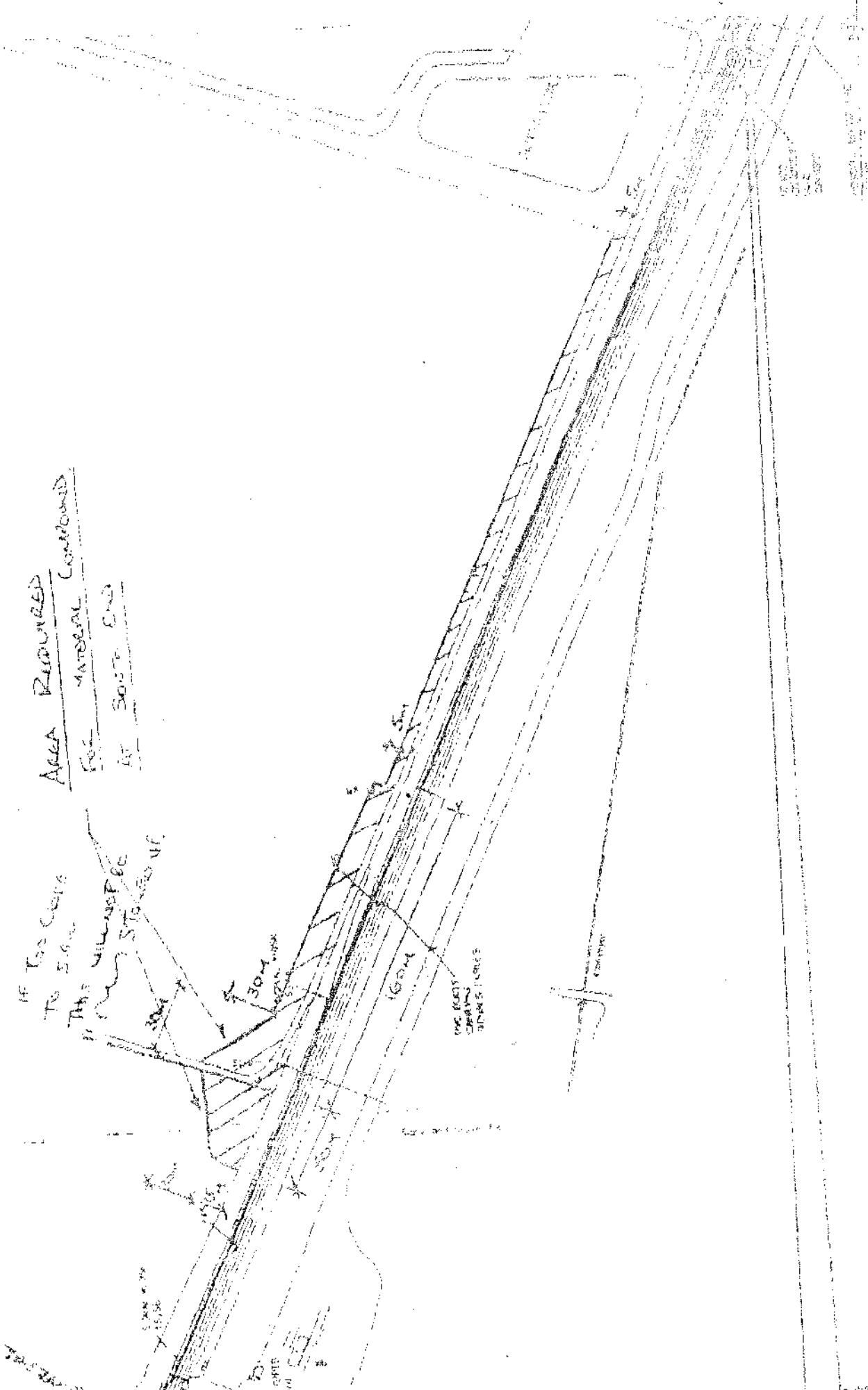
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Survey No. AL 21000A

Edgbaston Park

Edgbaston



AREA REQUIRED
 FOR MATERIAL COMPOUND
 AT SOUTH END

15 TOO CLOSE
 TO 5.0m
 THIS WILL BE
 STORAGED IN

30M

160M

THE PARTS
 COMPANY
 USING THESE

100M

AS SHOWN

SEE NOTES
 E.M. CASE

TOTAL