



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF BIRMINGHAM

**An Archaeological  
Watching Brief at  
Hermitage Farm,  
Wishaw, Sutton Coldfield,  
West Midlands**

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Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
**Project No. 688**  
April 2000

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at Hermitage Farm,  
Wishaw, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands**

by  
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# **An Archaeological Watching Brief at Hermitage Farm, Wishaw, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands**

## **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the groundworks for the construction of a private dwelling on land adjacent to Hermitage Farm, Wishaw, West Midlands (NGR SP 167 943). The site was next to the medieval moated site of Hermitage Farm (SMR 02251), within a field system of possible Roman origin (SMR 20511). Fieldwalking had recovered quantities of medieval and Roman pottery. However, no archaeological features or deposits were identified during the watching brief, although a sherd of 14th to 15th century pottery was recovered from the topsoil strip.*

## **Introduction**

This report outlines the results of a watching brief carried out during the topsoil strip and excavation of foundation trenches for the construction of a private dwelling on land adjacent to Hermitage Farm, Wishaw, Sutton Coldfield (NGR SP 167 943). It was undertaken to fulfil the archaeological conditions of Planning Application N/00950/99/FUL and in accordance with a brief (Appendix 1) prepared by the Birmingham City Planning Archaeologist. The work was commissioned by Andrew Cotterill, Agricultural Contractor & Plant Hire, and was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on 22nd and 29th March 2000. The work was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Appendix 2).

## **Archaeological Background (Fig.1)**

The development site is approximately 7km East of Sutton Coldfield and just to the north of Bull's Lane and to the west of Grove Lane. It is directly south-west of Hermitage Farm itself and located on land formerly used for arable farming. The local geology is Mercia Mudstone. The height of the site is between 100 and 110m A.O.D.

Hermitage Farm is a known medieval moated site (SMR 02251) with possible origins in the 13th and 14th centuries A.D. The southern arm of the moat remains water filled and has been enlarged to form a pond. The northern and western arms of the moat are dry and largely backfilled. No trace of the eastern arm exists. The farmhouse has been altered at various times but largely dates to the 19th century.

The development site is in the south-eastern corner of a regular field system (SMR 20511) that may have originated in the Roman period and field walking by the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society, in adjacent fields, has identified scatters of pottery, both Roman and medieval, along with flints of prehistoric origin (SMR 20011, 20208, 20565, 20575).

It was therefore conceivable that the development site was located in an area containing archaeology associated with prehistoric, Roman and/or medieval settlement.

## Method

The topsoil in the development site was removed by a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothed bucket. Then the subsoil was cleaned with a toothless ditching bucket. The foundation trenches were then excavated by machine, fitted with a toothed bucket. All groundwork was monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The intention was to clean and record any archaeological features encountered and to make a record of the stratigraphy even where no archaeology was identified.

## Results (Fig.2, Plates 1 & 2)

The topsoil strip of the development site measured approximately 30m by 25m and was approximately rectangular in shape with an average depth of 0.3m overburden. The topsoil was directly above the red clay natural subsoil horizon. A sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from the topsoil (see below).

No archaeological features were identified during the strip although there was a former drainage ditch aligned approximately east-west across the site and heading towards the south-west corner of the moat. A foundation trench excavated across this ditch revealed that it had a U-shaped profile 1m wide and 0.5m in depth. It was filled with a grey silt-clay deposit and there were some fragments of coke and iron slag within this deposit. There was recollection of this drainage ditch still in use in living memory, although it had obviously been backfilled for some years prior to the recent excavation.

## Conclusions

While the results of the archaeological watching brief were negative, it should be remembered that the area inspected was relatively small. On a positive note, ploughing here had not unduly disturbed any potential archaeological deposits likely to occur at the interface of the topsoil and subsoil beneath.

It is worth noting that it is a characteristic of medieval moated sites that activity tends to be concentrated inside of the moat platform, rather than outside. While no direct evidence was found of earlier activity from Roman or prehistoric times, the potential of these periods lies within the remarkable survival of several elements of early landscapes in this area of Sutton Coldfield.

## The Medieval Pottery Sherd by Kirsty Nichol

A single sherd of medieval pottery was recovered, weighing 57g, probably from a jar with a slight sag to the base. The surfaces were very abraded, however the vestige of a true green glaze was still present on the base. The fabric was coarse, buff-white with a reduced core, containing occasional red inclusions. It was probably of 14th to 15th Century date.

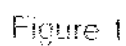
## Acknowledgements

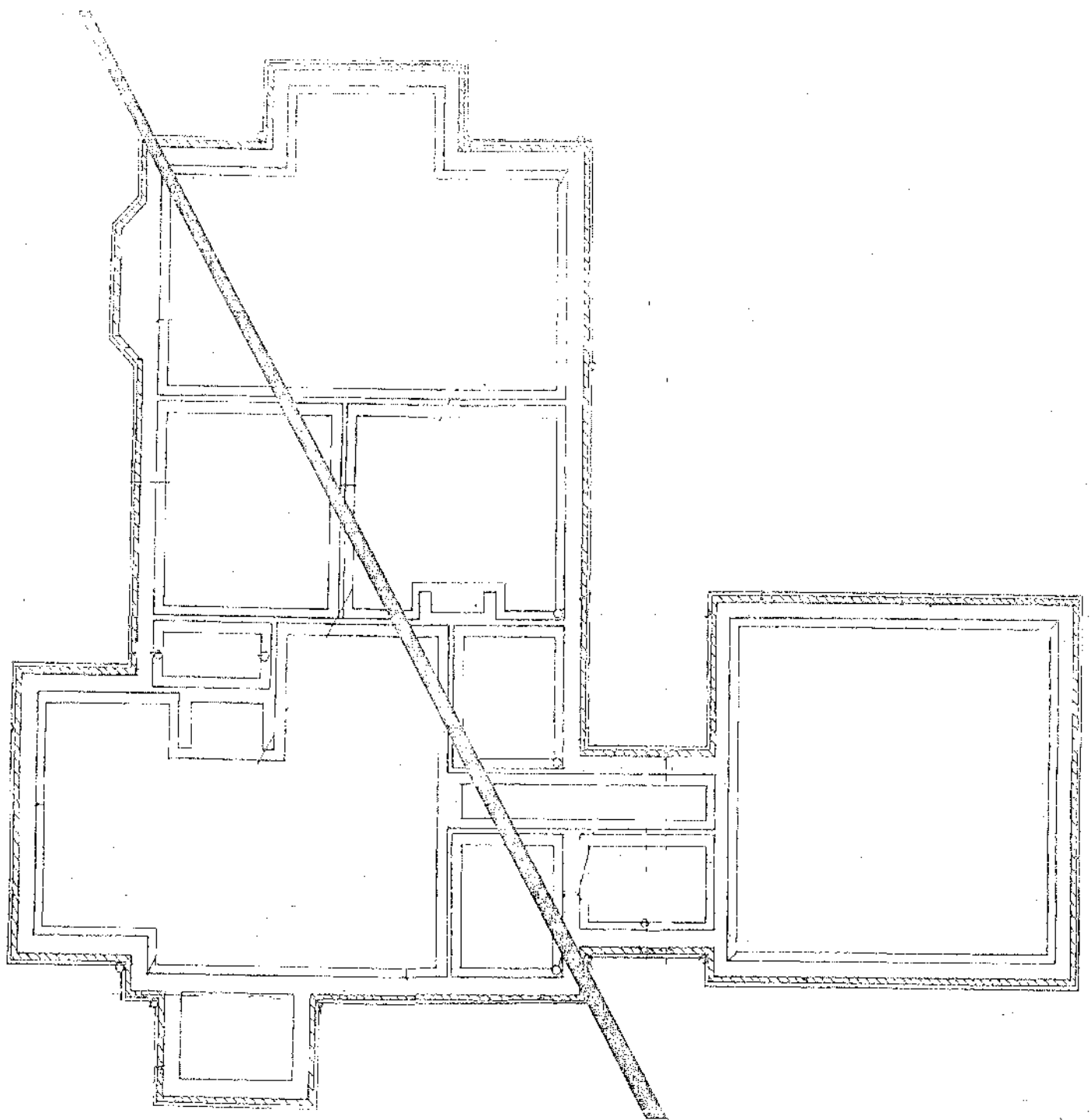
The watching brief was carried out by Gary Coates, the pottery identified by Kirsty Nichol and the project was managed by Steve Litherland; all from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The work was monitored by Dr. Mike Hodder, Birmingham City Planning Archaeologist. We are grateful to Andrew Cotterill and his family for their gracious hospitality and cooperation.

## References

Birmingham City Council, Department of Planning and Architecture, June 1999  
*"Hermitage Farm, Grove Lane, Sutton Coldfield (SP 167 943). Brief for archaeological observation and recording during development as a condition of planning permission"*

## Figures





Line of Drainage Ditch



0 Metres 5

Approximate Scale

Figure 2 Foundation Plan

## Plates

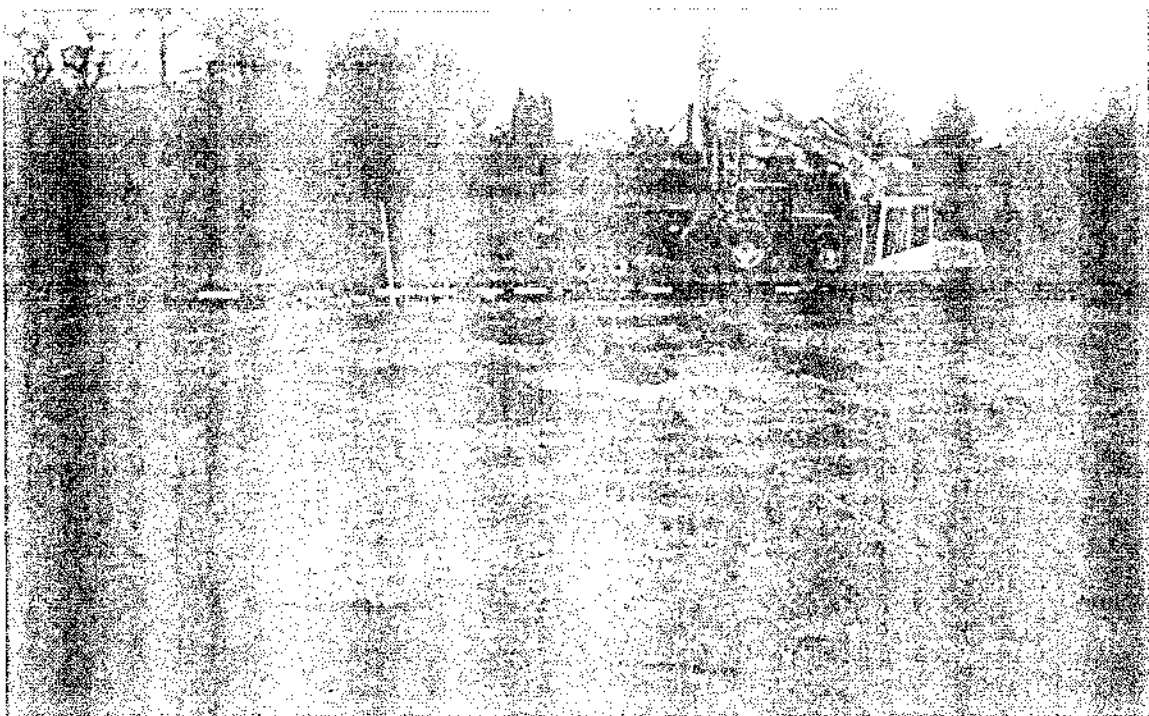


Plate 1



Plate 2

## Appendix 1

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE**

**Application number N/00950/99/FUL**

**Hermitage Farm, Grove Lane, Sutton Coldfield (SP 167943)**

**Brief for archaeological observation and recording during development as a condition of planning permission**

**1. Summary**

*Development at Hermitage Farm may expose and disturb below-ground archaeological remains, including This brief is for archaeological observation and recording of any archaeological features exposed by the development.*

**2. Site location and description**

The site lies on the north side of Bulls Lane and west of Hermitage Farm. It is currently agricultural land.

**3. Planning background**

Application no. N/00950/99/FUL is for the construction of a new dwelling. The site lies within an area of potential archaeological importance, next to a medieval moated site, within a historic field system and in an area where Roman and medieval pottery has been found in fieldwalking. Planning permission has therefore been granted on condition that archaeological observation and recording be carried out during development, at the applicant's expense.

**4. Existing archaeological information**

The site adjoins a moated site at Hermitage Farm (SMR 02251) and lies at the eastern end of a regular field system (SMR 20511) which may be Roman in origin. It is on the edge of the medieval hamlet of Over Green. Assarting is documented here in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Fieldwalking in fields to the west and north of Hermitage Farm has yielded large quantities of medieval pottery and smaller quantities of Roman pottery and worked flint which form significant local concentrations (SMR 20011, SMR 20208, SMR 20565, SMR 20575). These imply the existence of one or more of the following on or adjacent to the development site.

- medieval buildings or other structures associated with the moated site or belonging to the hamlet of Over Green
- deposition of refuse from medieval settlement at the moated site
- Roman settlement
- prehistoric settlement

**5. Requirements for work**

The development site may contain below-ground archaeological remains of prehistoric, Roman or medieval settlement which would be affected by the proposed development. In accordance with Policy 8.36 of the Council's Unitary Development Plan and, government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note

16. Archaeology and Planning, archaeological observation and recording is required during development.

### **6. Stages of work**

An appropriately skilled and qualified archaeologist is to be on site to observe all groundworks for the development, including topsoil stripping, foundation trenches, access and services. Any archaeological features exposed are to be recorded by written description, drawing and photography. No archaeological excavation is to be undertaken other than cleaning exposed deposits for better definition. Adequate time is to be allowed for observation and recording to take place. Finds are to be retrieved as they are revealed during groundworks or cleaning. Finds are to be cleaned, marked and bagged and any remedial conservation work undertaken.

### **7. Staffing**

The archaeological observation and recording is to be carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct, Standards, Guidelines and practices of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and all staff are to be suitably qualified and experienced for their roles in the project. It is recommended that the project be under the direct supervision of a Member or Associate Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

### **8. Written Scheme of Investigation**

Potential contractors should present a Written Scheme of Investigation which details methods and staffing. It is recommended that the proposal be submitted to the City Council's Planning Archaeologist before a contractor is commissioned, to ensure that it meets the requirements of this brief.

### **9. Monitoring**

The archaeological observation and recording must be carried out to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning and Architecture, Birmingham City Council, and will be monitored on his behalf by the Planning Archaeologist.

### **10. Reporting**

The results of the archaeological observation and recording are to be presented as a written report, containing appropriate illustrations. A copy must be sent to the Planning Archaeologist.

### **11. Archive deposition**

The written, drawn and photographic records of the archaeological observation and recording, together with any finds, must be deposited with an appropriate repository within a reasonable time of completion, following consultation with the Planning Archaeologist.

### **12. Publication**

The written report will become publicly accessible, as part of the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record, within six months of completion. The contractor must submit a short summary report for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology* and appropriate period journals.

**DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE  
BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

Date prepared: 3 June 1999

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## Appendix 2

**Hermitage Farm, Grove Lane,  
Wishaw, Sutton Coldfield,**

**Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief**

## **1.0 Introduction**

This document outlines the programme of work required to undertake a watching brief at the above site. It forms a written scheme of investigation required as part of the planning permission (planning application N/00950/99/FUL) granted by the Department of Planning and Architecture, Birmingham City Council. Any variation in the scope of work would be agreed with Dr. Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council, before implementation.

The work will be carried out during the topsoil strip and excavation of the foundation trenches associated with the development of a private dwelling

## **2.0 Aims**

The archaeological watching brief is intended to provide a record of any archaeological deposits or features which might be present below the modern ground surface, and to provide an understanding of the history and the significance of the archaeology of the site as a whole.

These aims will be achieved through a programme of archaeological monitoring visits to the site during contractors below-ground works.

## **3.0 The Site**

The site is approximately 7km east of Sutton Coldfield and just to the north of Bull's Lane and to the west of Grove Lane. It lies directly south-west of Hermitage Farm, on land formerly used for arable farming.

Hermitage Farm is a known medieval moated site (SMR 02251) with possible origins in the 13th and 14th centuries A.D. The site itself is in the south-eastern corner of a regular field system (SMR 20511) that may have originated in the Roman period and field walking in adjacent fields has identified scatters of pottery, both Roman and medieval, along with flints of prehistoric origin (SMR 20011, 20208, 20565, 20575).

## **4.0 Archaeological Watching Brief**

#### **4.1: Aims**

The objectives of the archaeological watching brief will be to monitor all below-ground works, including topsoil stripping, downcutting of existing levels, foundation and service trenches, and to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains affected by the development works.

#### **4.2: Method**

All groundworks will be monitored by a qualified archaeologist. This will be complemented by salvage recording of any archaeological deposits and features revealed by contractors groundworks. All artefacts will be recovered and recorded.

#### **5.0: Staffing**

The fieldwork will be monitored for BUFAU by Steve Litherland (Project Officer, BUFAU).

Specialist staff will be, where appropriate:

Lynne Bevan - Flint artefacts and small finds.

Lisa Moffett - charred plant remains.

Umberto Albarella, Birmingham Environmental Laboratory - animal bone.

Dr James Greig - pollen and plant macro-fossils.

Dr David Smith - micro-fauna.

Dr Susan Limbrey - soils.

Dr Ann Woodward - prehistoric ceramics.

Annette Hancocks - Romano-British ceramics.

Stephanie Ratkai - medieval and Post-medieval pottery.

Kirsty Nichol – medieval and Post-medieval pottery

#### **6.0: Report**

The results of the archaeological fieldwork will be described in an illustrated report, which will contain the following:

- (a) Description of the archaeological background.
- (b) Method.
- (c) A narrative description of the results and discussion of the evidence, set in their local and regional context, supported by appropriate plans and sections.
- (d) Summary of the finds and environmental evidence.
- (e) Specialist assessments of the finds and environmental evidence.

The written report will be made publicly accessible, as part of the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record within six months of completion. A summary report will be submitted for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology*.

#### **7.0: Archive**

The site archive will be prepared according to the guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects.

### **8.0: Timetable**

An archaeological watching brief will be maintained throughout below-ground works. A precise timetable is not available at present.

### **9.0: General**

All project staff will adhere to the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

The project will follow the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

A detailed Risk Assessment will be prepared prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit,  
21st March 2000.*