

**An archaeological
watching brief
The Duckery, Great Barr,
West Midlands
2001**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 774
January 2002

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2001**

by
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1.0 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at the Duckery, Great Barr, West Midlands (NGR SP 049 959) by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The work was carried out between the 26th February 2001 and the 28th March 2001, on behalf of Severn Trent Water Ltd during the replacement of a foul water sewer. The sewer pipeline was located in an area of semi-natural ancient woodland known as The Duckery. The site lay within the Grade II Registered Park and Garden of Great Barr (Black Country SMR 3952) and on the edge of the former medieval settlement of Great Barr (Black Country SMR 5830). It was thought that groundworks might reveal archaeological features associated with these two sites. However, no archaeological features or deposits were identified and no artefacts were recovered.

2.0 Introduction (Fig. 1)

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during groundworks associated with the replacement of a foul water sewer pipeline running through The Duckery, Great Barr, West Midlands (NGR SP 049 959, Fig. 1). The archaeological fieldwork was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) between the 26th February and the 28th March 2001, on behalf of Severn Trent Water Ltd.

A recommendation for the provision of an archaeological watching brief was made by the Black Country Archaeologist, Mr Michael Shaw, as the area was identified as being of potential interest. The site was located in an area of semi-natural ancient woodland within the Grade II Registered Park and Garden of Great Barr (Black Country SMR 3952) and on the edge of the former medieval settlement of Great Barr (Black Country SMR 5830). It was thought that groundworks might reveal archaeological features associated with these two sites.

The guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999) were followed.

3.0 Site Location (Fig. 2)

The Duckery is located in what is thought to be the original medieval centre of Great Barr (Fig. 2). The site is bounded on the north by Chapel Lane and to the west by the churchyard of St. Margaret's Church. To the east and south the site is bounded by the grounds of what was St. Margaret's Hospital, which was previously the park of Great Barr Hall.

4.0 Historical Background

The name Great Barr is derived from Welsh and means great top or summit. A Saxon Charter of 957 refers to a grant of Little Aston and Barr. By the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 the estate had been split into three, with Little Aston having become part of Shenstone while Barr had become Magna Barr and Parva Barr. The two were later joined together to become part of the manor of Great Barr and Aldridge.

There was no church at Great Barr until mid 13th century, when a chapel was built. From about 1200 Great Barr was part of the parish of Aldridge and the chapel was subsidiary to the latter's parish church serving farms that were scattered across the area. The location of the nucleus of the original Medieval settlement is uncertain but is believed to have been centred around the church of St. Margaret and to the north of what is now Chapel Farm. Earthworks are visible in the field to the north of the church and consist of possible house platforms and a ditch, which is either a deer park boundary or a hollow way.

Chapel Lane, the main road which runs through Great Barr and borders the site to the north, originally ran around the southern side of the church, close to or even through the area of The Duckery. The exact date when the road was moved is uncertain but seems to have been in the Post-Medieval period.

To the east of the site was the park of Great Barr Hall, a landscaped park designed by Humphrey Repton around 1800. The park included a gothic mansion, a chapel, lodges, carriage drives, lakes, cascades and scenic walks. Further landscaping occurred in the later 19th century and the site finally became St Margaret's Hospital in the early 20th century built, on a series of terraces on the rising ground to the east.

5.0 Objectives

The objectives of the watching brief were to monitor all below-ground works associated with the replacement of the existing sewer pipeline. Any archaeological remains uncovered during the course of the groundworks were to be recorded to an appropriate level. Sampling and recovery of any contextual evidence which may contribute to an understanding of the archaeological remains within the area was also to take place.

6.0 Method

The objectives were achieved through a series of site visits during the contractors' groundworks between 26th February and 28th March 2001. The groundworks consisted of the removal of topsoil across two narrow strips through the woodland between two man-holes where the existing pipeline ran. The first strip was 58m long and 15m wide, aligned north-east to south-west parallel with Chapel Lane to the north-east. The pipeline then turned 90 degrees towards the south-east and a second length was stripped, 98m long and 15m wide.

A 5m deep trench was then excavated along the length of the pipeline in lengths of approximately 10m. A steel box was used to shore up the sides so that the old pipe sections could be lifted out and the new ones lowered in. After each length had been completed the trench was back-filled.

Any observed deposits were to be recorded using pre-printed *pro-forma* recording cards for features and contexts, supplemented by scale drawings of sections and plans. Colour-slide and black and white photographs were also taken as appropriate. These records form the site archive which will be deposited at the Black Country Sites and Monuments Record.

7.0 Archaeological Results

The site was located on a curved, level strip of land at the foot of the slope running down from the churchyard to the west. To the east of the site the slope continued into a marshy area below. Whether this was the location of the original road that ran around the south of the church is uncertain.

The groundworks showed the topsoil to be between 20-40cm in depth overlying reddish-clay subsoil. The methods of excavation used were not conducive to archaeological recording. A thin layer of topsoil was left over the subsoil across most of the site. This, along with the tracking of plant machinery across the area, made it extremely difficult to observe whether or not any archaeological deposits were present. In the areas where the topsoil was fully stripped to expose the subsoil no archaeological features were observed. Nor were any features observed in the pipeline trench; most of the excavated material was backfill of the earlier pipe trench and the use of the steel box for shoring prevented any features that may have been present from being recorded.

8.0 Acknowledgements

The watching brief was sponsored by Severn Trent Water Ltd and was carried out by Chris Patrick for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The report was written by Chris Patrick and edited by Simon Buteux. Illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. The project was managed for BUFAU by Simon Buteux. Thanks are due to Mr Michael Shaw, Black Country Archaeologist, Mr John Mills of Haswell Consulting Engineers and the staff of Severn Trent Water Ltd.



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Fig. 1

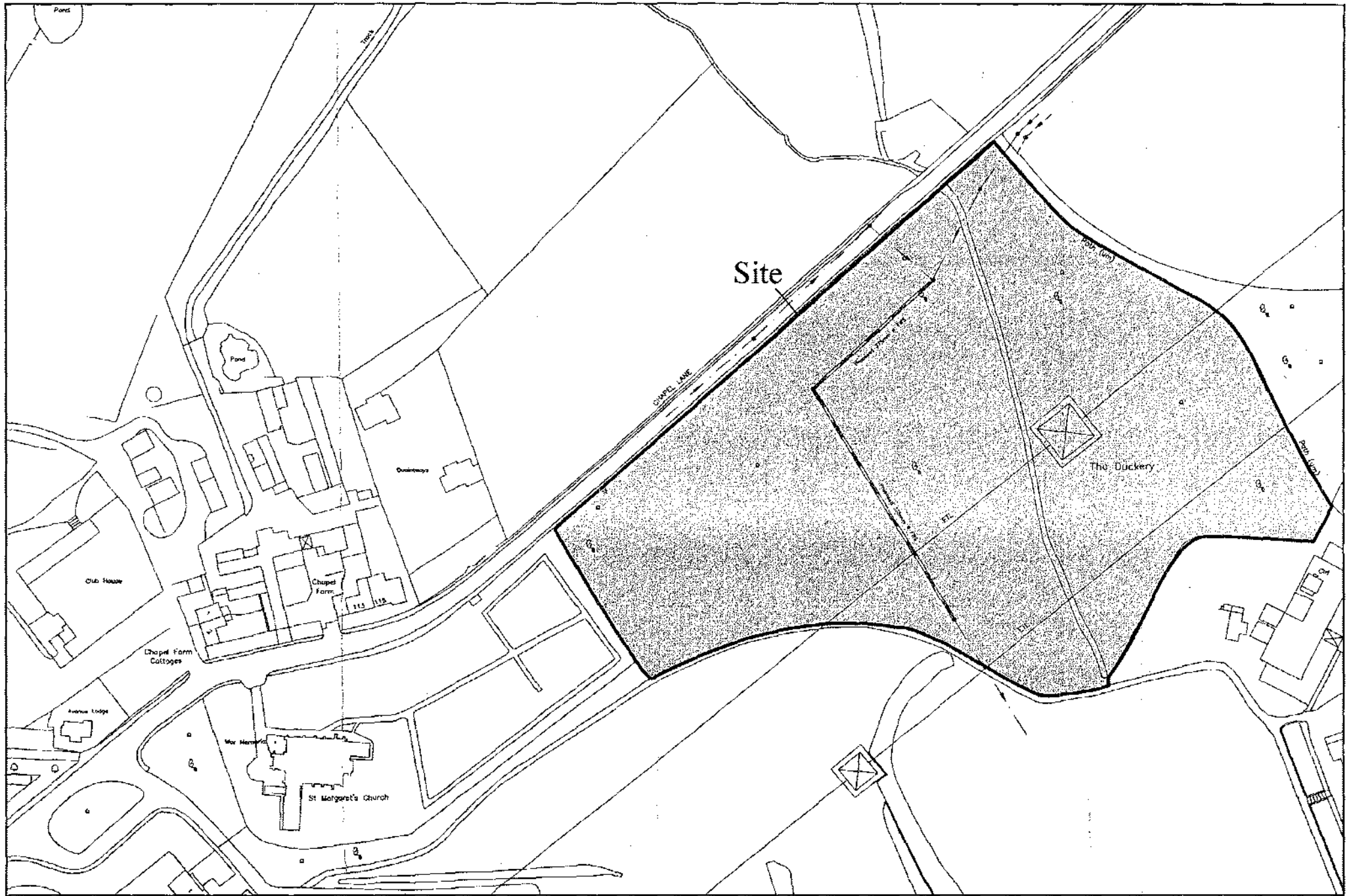


Fig.2