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41 Eastgate Street, Stafford, Staffordshire: an archaeological evaluation 2001

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1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 41 Eastgate Street, Stafford, Staffordshire (centred on NGR SJ 9253 2323) by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit between 19th November 2001 and 21st November 2001. The evaluation was carried out on behalf of Woodmatech Limited and was required by Staffordshire Borough Council in connection with a planning application for the residential redevelopment of the site. The site is located within the historic medieval core of the town, close to the former medieval town defences and with good potential for the survival of archaeological remains dating from the Roman period to the postmedieval period.

A single trial-trench was excavated with a second trench to be excavated, after an existing building on the site has been demolished. Two parallel linear intercutting ditches, containing no dateable artefacts, were revealed. The ditches were sealed by layers containing medieval pottery, suggesting the ditches may be of similar medieval date. A post-medieval pit, possibly a tanning pit, was also recorded cutting the uppermost of these layers. The depth of stratigraphy encountered here may suggest that archaeological deposits could be preserved below the level of the cellar beneath the existing building on the site. The evaluation together with further information which will be obtained by the excavation of the second trial-trench, should provide sufficient data to enable a planning decision to be made and a suitable mitigation strategy to be designed.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit between 19th November 2001 and the 21st November 2001 at 41 Eastgate Street, Stafford, Staffordshire (hereafter referred to as the site). The work was carried out on behalf of Woodmatech Limited and was required by Stafford Borough Council in connection with planning applications (ref. no. 39547 and 39548) for the redevelopment of the site involving the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of student cluster flats. This first stage of evaluation will provide information to allow the planning applications to be considered. A further stage of evaluation will be carried out after existing buildings have been demolished, as a condition of planning consent.

The evaluation adhered to a brief prepared by the Development Department of Stafford Borough Council (Wilkinson 2001) which identified the site as having good potential for the existence of archaeological features or deposits dating from the Roman period to the post-medieval period. The site was visited by D. Wilkinson and L. Walters of the Development Department of Stafford Borough Council in order to monitor the fieldwork. All work on site was carried out in accordance with a brief prepared by Stafford Borough Council (Wilkinson 2001) and in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

3.0 Site location and description (Figs. 1 and 2)

The site (centred on NGR SJ9253 2323) is located within the east-side of the historic medieval core of Stafford, and is situated close to the course of the former town walls of the medieval settlement. The site covers an area of approximately 1460m² and is bordered to the north by North Walls and to the south by Eastgate Street. Adjacent, to the east, is a triangular plot containing commercial premises and to the west of the site are other properties in a block of buildings fronting onto Eastgate Street and North Walls. The majority of the site is occupied by a former shoe factory building, constructed around the turn of the century, with a cellar occupying half the space below the building and an open tarmac yard to the north. The geology of the site comprises river terrace deposits of sand and gravel.

4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The archaeological and historical background has been detailed in the evaluation brief (Wilkinson 2001) and will only be summarised in this report. Stafford is built on a gravel peninsula terrace; and the land to the south, east and west was in the flood plain of the River Sowe and the Pearl Brook and was marshland in the prehistoric period. There is no evidence for any prehistoric settlement sites in Stafford, although a few chance finds of prehistoric artefacts have been recorded. Roman deposits, possibly connected with land reclamation, and other features have been excavated, nearby to the south of the site at Clark Street, and evidence of Roman settlement has been recorded elsewhere in the town.

There is documentary and archaeological evidence of occupation during the Anglo-Saxon period. Documentary evidence suggests that a defended settlement or 'burgh' existed at Stafford from the 10th century. This settlement may have been provided with defences, possibly a ditch and bank, the location of which is unknown. These defences may have been on the line of the later medieval defences or they may have enclosed a smaller area. Stafford had an important pottery industry during Anglo-Saxon period and archaeological evidence of this was found in the form of dumps of pottery wasters at Clark Street (Carver 1980). Kilns of Late -Saxon date, which would have produced Stafford Ware pottery, have been excavated at several sites in the town.

Stafford was a major town in the medieval period and was enclosed by a circuit of town walls, the course of which is depicted on early maps of the town, close to the north boundary of the site. The remains of the town's east gate, now a scheduled ancient monument, survive to the east of the site. Previous excavations within the town have recorded evidence of structural medieval features, as well as other settlement features including rubbish pits and wells. Close to the site at Clark Street post built timber buildings of 12th century date have been excavated (Carver1980).

Post-medieval cartographic evidence suggests the site may have been partly occupied by buildings in the 17th and 18th centuries, and that some form of leatherworking was carried out on the site in the 19th century.

The archaeological and historical evidence suggests that there is high potential for the survival of archaeological features or deposits within the site, dating from the Roman to the post-medieval period.

5.0 Aims

The aim of the evaluation, as stated in the brief, is 'to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving deposits liable to be threatened by the proposed development'. The aims were also to assess the preservation of archaeological deposits and the degree of disturbance by later interventions and to provide sufficient information to enable a planning decision to be made.

6.0 Method

The aims of the evaluation were achieved through the excavation of a single trialtrench, 20m long and 2m wide, located within the open yard in the north part of the site. This evaluation trench is the first stage of the evaluation of the site. After the demolition of the existing standing buildings occupying the site, a second evaluation trench (9m x 2m) will be dug to determine the nature of any archaeological deposits in this area. These two trenches will provide a $58m^2$ sample (4%) of the site.

The trench was excavated by machine, under archaeological supervision, down to the natural subsoil or the upper surface of any significant archaeological horizon. Due to the depth of the stratigraphy and disturbance by live services, by necessity the trench was excavated to a variety of depths depending on the location of services. Any significant archaeological deposits encountered were excavated by hand and recorded on *pro-forma* record cards supplemented by scale plans, section drawings and photographs, where appropriate. Even where no archaeological deposits were identified, the stratigraphy was recorded and photographed. Finds were retained by context and finds recording and conservation were carried out by suitably qualified staff. Soil samples were to be taken from suitable contexts to recover charred plant remains and to assess the potential for environmental analysis.

The paper records, together with the finds, comprise the site archive, which, at the time of writing, is stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The archive will be deposited with the relevant repository, within a reasonable time after the completion of the evaluation, subject to approval by the landowner.

7.0 Results (Figs. 3 and 4)

The natural yellow sand and gravel subsoil (1011), was exposed near the southeast end of the trench, at a depth of 1.35m below the present carpark surface (74.03m AOD), sloping down to northwest end of the trench at a depth of 1.61m below the present carpark surface (73.77m AOD). Cutting the natural subsoil (1011), were two parallel linear inter-cutting ditches aligned approximately northwest-southcast, both of which extended beyond the edge of the trench. The earliest of these ditches (Fig. 3, S2-S.4; F100, F101 and F104) was at least 1.30m wide and 0.50m deep with a steep side and flat base. The ditch was filled with up to three fills of brown silty sands (1000, 1001, 1006, 1007, 1008, 1016 and 1017).

The later ditch (Fig. 3, S.2 and S.3; F102 and F105) cut the earlier ditch to the southwest and was at least 1.20m wide and 0.40m deep. The fill of this ditch (1005 and 1015) comprised brown silty sands. No finds were recovered from the fills of either of these ditches. There was no evidence for the presence of either of these ditches at the northwest end of this trench, suggesting they either terminated or changed orientation.

Sealing the ditches was a layer of dark grey sandy silt (1018), 0.10-0.20m deep and only visible in a section (Fig. 3, S.2 and Fig. 4) in the middle of the evaluation trench. The full extent of this layer was not determined, although it does not appear to be present along the whole length of the trench. Sealing both layer 1018 and the natural subsoil (1011) was a layer of grey silty clay (1004), 0.20m deep, containing a single sherd of possible Stafford Ware pottery of Late Saxon date. Layer 1004 was not present at the southeast end of the trench. Above this was a layer of light brown silty sand (1003), 0.10m deep. Layer 1003 was not present at the southeast end of the trench. Overlying 1003 was a layer of dark grey silty sandy clay (1002), 0.30-0.40m deep, containing sherds of medieval pottery. This layer was present over the full length of the trench.

Cutting layer 1002, was a pit (F103) probably sub-circular in shape, although the full extent of the feature was not revealed within the trench and it had been truncated by a modern service trench. Pit F103 (Fig. 3, S.1) was at least 2.4m x 1.9m wide and 0.50m deep, with steeply sloping sides and a flat base. It was deliberately lined with a pink clay (1012), 0.10-0.40m thick, containing a concentration of sandstone rubble close to the outer edge the pit, within a slight depression. Above 1012 was a secondary fill of dark grey charcoal-rich silt (1013), 0.20m deep, containing sherds of post-medieval pottery, fragments of ceramic roof tile and animal bone. The final fill of F103 was a light grey sandy silt (1014), 0.10-0.25m deep, which was rich in a white calciferous material.

Pit F103 and layer 1002 were sealed by a layer of dark brown silt (1009), 0.75-0.90m deep, containing a sherd of late post-medieval pottery, brick fragments and animal bone. Layer 1009 extended over whole length of the trench. Above this was 0.20m of gravel and brick rubble make-up material (1010), capped by 0.1m of tarmac.

8.0 Finds

| Feature | Context | Description | Date range |
|---------|---------|--|--|
| Layer | 1002 | 4 x medieval pottery (55g) | Later 13th -14th century |
| Layer | 1004 | 1x medieval pottery (9g) | Late Saxon? |
| Layer | 1009 | 1x post-medieval pottery (22g); animal bone (724g) | Later 19th century |
| F103 | 1013 | 4x ceramic roof tile (555g); 4x medieval pottery (35g) | Later 17 th -early 18 th |
| | L | and animal bone (1273g) including large horn cores | century |

Table 1: Finds quantification by Annette Hancocks

8.1 The pottery by S. Ratkai

Spot dating

Context 1002 Date: later 13th century (14th century) Whiteware (SC fab C11) bowl, internal copper coloured lead glaze, 1 sherd, 14g Mudstone tempered cooking pot (SC fab D31) 2 joining body sherds, 17g Sandy cooking pot (SC fab D12), internal soot, 1 sherd 23g

Context 1004 Date: Late Saxon? Sandy body sherd ?Stafford Ware, 1 sherd, 5g

Context 1009 Date: later 19th century Blue transfer printed, 1 sherd, 21g

Context 1013, F103 Date: later 17th -early 18th century Coarseware internal toffee brown glaze, 1 sherd, 9g Coarseware rim sherd, dark brown glaze, bowl/pancheon, 1 sherd, 6g. Whiteware (Scfab C11) jug, external olive glaze, 1 sherd, 3g. Jug/pitcher (SC fab F03), opaque decayed or insufficiently fluxed external glaze, 1 sherd, 11g.

The pottery assemblage consisted of 10 sherds. Of these three were post-medieval, six medieval and one possibly Late Saxon.

The possible Stafford ware sherd from 1004 is very small. The sherd is red-brown in colour with a temper of abundant rounded quartz. The small sherd size made it difficult to determine if it had been wheel-thrown. There was no very clear parallel for this sherd in the Stafford Castle type series, which tends to suggest that it may well be Stafford Ware.

All the medieval sherds could be paralleled in the Stafford Castle pottery type series (Ratkai in prep). The mudstone tempered cooking pots are amongst the carliest from the castle site and appear to have been in use from the late 11th century and into the 12th century. The large residual component in the castle assemblage means that it is not clear whether these fabrics continued in use into the 13th century. The sandy cooking pot also occurs from the earliest castle levels onwards and probably continued in use into the 13th century. It is possible that it may have been made from as early as the second quarter of the 13th century but the evidence for this is still equivocal. It

continued in use throughout the 14th century. The bowl form and glaze type suggests a date of the later 13th or 14th centuries. The jug/pitcher sherd with opaque glaze is most likely a local product dating to the ?later 12th century or early 13th century.

8.2 The animal bone by E.Murray

A small assemblage of hand-collected animal bones (c. 2 kgs) was recovered from the fill of the post-medieval pit F103 (1013) and layer 1009. The species represented are cattle, horse, sheep/goat and pig. A horse femur (proximal epiphysis) from 1009 was heavily gnawed providing indirect evidence for dog. It has been speculated that Pit F103 may be associated with leatherworking and it produced both cattle horncores (NISP 3) and post-cranial cattle, horse, sheep and pig bones (NISP 8). The assemblage is really too small to make any contribution to the interpretation of the pit's function, and the range of species and elements represented could derive from a number of disposal practices.

8.3 The tile by A. Hancocks

Four fragments (555g) of post-medieval roof tile were recovered from context 1013 (F103). These are of similar date to the pottery recovered from this deposit. No diagnostic elements were recognised.

9.0 Discussion

The evaluation has revealed the presence of remains of local and regional archaeological significance. The earliest features recorded during the evaluation were two parallel inter-cutting ditches. Although these features are not directly datable, they were scaled by several layers, one of which contained a single sherd of possible Stafford Ware pottery of Late Saxon date and another layer contained sherds of medieval pottery of late 13th- century to 14th- century date. It is possible that the small sherd of possible Stafford ware is residual. This stratigraphic information indicates the ditches are of medieval or possibly of earlier date. The function of these features is unclear, although they are aligned parallel with the suspected course of the northern town walls of medieval Stafford. The features are relatively well preserved, sealed below several layers of later deposits.

Four of the layers (1018, 1004, 1003 and 1002) sealing the ditches and the natural sand and gravel may be of medieval date, but only two layers 1004 and 1002 contained dateable pottery consistent with this date. The latest of these layers 1002, was cut by the pit F103 which was of post-medieval date, possibly of late 17th- century to early 18th- century date. The relatively large quantity of animal bone including horn cores recovered from the pit may be waste products from tanning. Examples of 15th-17th- century tanning pits excavated a Northampton (Shaw 1996), appear to demonstrate a strong similarity in form and content with this pit. This feature is probably a tanning pit and may be early evidence of a leather industry suggested by the presence of a curriers yard, depicted on the 1881 O.S map. This

industrial activity continued into the 20th century, with the construction of a boot and shoe factory building, which still occupies most of the site.

A level of 74.325m AOD was recorded on the outside step of the cellar, which is 1.3m deep, of the existing building on the site. The probable medieval features and layers and post-medieval pit recorded in the trench were approximately at or below this level. This would appear to suggest that medieval features and deposits could potentially survive beneath the cellar of this building. Disturbance by recent service trenches appears to have affected only relatively recent deposits. Little modern disturbance of significant archaeological features was recorded due to the deep stratigraphy within the site, although medieval features may be disturbed by 17th- and 18th- century industrial activity associated with the leather industry.

10.0 Recommendations

The results of the evaluation suggest that significant archaeological deposits survive at depths of approximately 1m or deeper below the present ground surface, within the site. Archaeological features and deposits could survive beneath cellars. Therefore, any proposed redevelopment of the site involving excavation deeper than 1m below the present ground surface may affect significant archaeological features and deposits.

11.0 Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was supervised by M. Duncan with the assistance of S. Blake. This report was written by M. Duncan and L. Jones and edited by S. Buteux. The illustrations were prepared by N. Dodds. The assessment of the finds assemblage was by A. Hancocks, S. Ratkai amd E. Murray. The project was managed by L. Jones.

12.0 References

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Fig.2



