



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF BIRMINGHAM

**The City Hospital  
Grounds, Winson Green,  
Birmingham**

**Archaeological Observation and  
Recording**

*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit*



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2003**

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**The City Hospital Grounds, Winson Green, Birmingham**  
**Archaeological Observation and Recording**  
**2003**

**Summary**

*Archaeological observation and recording was carried out at the City Hospital grounds, Winson Green, Birmingham (NGR SP04858775) during groundworks for the construction of new buildings.*

*A Desk-based assessment conducted prior to this phase of archaeological work had highlighted the area as containing buildings associated with the Workhouse and subsequent infirmary, which was built in 1849 and demolished in 1992. A test pit was excavated and the rubble and overburden were removed within the foundations for the new building footprint. Several walls were identified and recorded. These were determined to represent the foundations of the old Nurses' Home, the Master's House, the corner of the central arm of the School Block and the Chapel. No other archaeological features or deposits were encountered.*

**1.0 Introduction**

This report describes the results of archaeological observation and recording carried out during groundworks for the redevelopment of the City Hospital grounds (centred on NGR SP 04858775). The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of the Jarvis Construction (UK) Ltd.

The observation and recording was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 2003), and adhered to the guidelines set down in Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

**2.0 Site Location (Figs. 1 and 2)**

The development site is situated in the south-east corner of the City Hospital Grounds, centred on NGR SP 04858775, and was most recently used as part of the hospital car park. The City Hospital grounds are bordered by Dudley Road to the south, Western Road to the east, the Birmingham Canal to the north, and by housing to the west, and are approximately two miles to the north-west of Birmingham City Centre.

**3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

Archaeological work comprising a desk-based assessment (Hislop 2002) was undertaken prior to this stage of archaeological mitigation, and the full results will not be repeated in this report. The assessment suggested that until the 19<sup>th</sup> century exploitation of the development area and its surroundings was almost entirely confined to pasturage, and that, on the basis of the cartographic evidence, pre-19<sup>th</sup>-century archaeological deposits were unlikely to be encountered. The only substantial

development appeared to be the Workhouse of 1849 and the succeeding hospital complexes. The Development Site was formerly occupied by a greater part of the southern, E-shaped block of the Workhouse, including the Chapel, as well as the Master's House and Boys Home of *circa* 1888. Regarding the Chapel, the desk-based assessment suggested that there was no reason to suspect that human burials were likely to be found within its vicinity or elsewhere within the Development Site.

#### **4.0 Objectives**

The objectives of the observation and recording were to identify and record any previously-unknown archaeological deposits or features encountered during the groundworks, and to record and interpret the exposed foundations of buildings known to have existed previously on site.

#### **5.0 Method**

The objectives were achieved through a series of site visits during the contractors groundworks. During the removal of asbestos from the site, no archaeological monitoring was conducted due to safety reasons. The groundworks comprised the stripping of the overburden down to the natural subsoil in the areas affected by the new building foundations, and a deep excavation test pit, in order to test the natural subsoil horizons.

A photographic record was maintained during the archaeological works, supplemented by notes and sketches, which, together with recovered brick samples, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

#### **6.0 Archaeological Results (Fig. 3, Plate 1)**

##### **Test Pit**

A test pit was dug on the site in order to test the quality of the natural subsoil horizons, in order to determine the depth to which the build would have to go.

A trench measuring 19m by 11.5m, surrounded by a 2m batter on all sides and 2.5m deep, was excavated in the middle of the site. This was cut into the natural subsoil horizon of yellow sand and gravel. Above this was a layer of dark grey sand and silt with some pebbles and some brick rubble. Cut through this and the natural subsoil horizon below was a series of brick walls aligned east-west. These walls were approximately 0.2m wide at the top, widening to 0.4m at the base. Fifteen courses of bricks were visible, to a depth of 1.2m in total. The cuts for the foundation trenches for these walls were identified in section at the base of the walls. The southernmost wall contained sandstone blocks at the base of the foundation cut. It was apparent that the original ground level in this area was lower than the modern ground level, and that the upper part of the walls identified represented the original visible structure. A brick floor or surface was identified between the two internal walls, that survived approximately five courses deep. The dimensions of the building represented by the

walls would indicate a building 11.5m wide and is likely to represent the foundations of the Master's House (later the Matron's flat). Overlying the floor and walls was a substantial deposit of brick rubble.

During the overburden strip several walls (1 – 5, Fig. 3) relating to the old hospital complex were identified. To the north-east of the stripped area two parallel walls, aligned north-south, were identified (2). These walls were approximately 7.3m apart, and were approximately 0.55m – 0.6m wide. Eleven courses of bricks were visible to a depth of 1.5m below the modern surface. The walls comprised red-orange bricks, some of which appeared crudely made, with an average size 9" x 3 ½ " x 4 ½ ". These bricks were bonded together with pale brown mortar with white inclusions. Identified between these walls was a deposit of redeposited orange clay and sand. The location and alignment of these walls suggests they represent the foundations for the Nurses' Home which was originally part of the E-shaped school block south of the Workhouse. The Workhouse and E-shaped school block were constructed in 1849.

To the south-west of the Nurses' Home, another brick structure was identified (1 and 5, Fig. 3). This structure comprised two walls, approximately 0.35m apart, with evidence of a brick floor, surface or support extending out from each side. Each wall was approximately 0.6m wide, with nine courses of bricks visible beneath the modern ground surface. The walls comprised orange bricks with an average size 9" x 3 ½ " x 4 ¾ ". These bricks were bonded together with a pale brown mortar with white inclusions. The floor/surface/support visible extending out from the walls comprised bricks similar to those of the wall, bonded together with hard, white mortar. The position of these walls suggests they represent the foundations for the south-eastern corner of the S-block, which like the Nurses' Home was originally part of the E-shaped school block located to the south of the Workhouse. The surface or support may represent a buttress feature on this corner.

To the west of the stripped area two parallel walls aligned east-west were identified (3 and 4, Fig. 3). The northernmost of these walls (3) was approximately 1m wide and nine courses deep, and survived to a depth of 1.2m below the modern ground surface. This wall comprised crude hand-clamped bricks with large inclusions and an average size of 9" x 3 ½ " x 3 ½ ". The face of the wall was predominantly constructed by stretchers and headers. The second wall identified in this area (4) was located to the south of wall 3 and extended further to the east. This wall comprised bricks similar to that of wall 3. This wall (4) was only visible in plan. The location and alignment of these walls suggests they represent part of the foundations for the Chapel, which was located beyond the southern extremity of the central arm of the school block.

## **7.0 Discussion**

No archaeological features or deposits were identified that pre-dated the Workhouse and associated buildings, and no structures were identified that were not previously highlighted within the desk-based assessment.

The structures identified correspond to the existing maps and plans of the old workhouse, hospital complex and associated buildings. The Workhouse was

demolished in 1992 (Hislop 2002). The depth to which the walls survive suggests that the preservation of the remains relating to the rest of the Workhouse is good.

## **8.0 Acknowledgements**

This project was sponsored by Jarvis Construction (UK) Ltd. The archaeological observation and recording was carried out by Kate Bain, Bob Burrows, Mary Duncan, Emma Hancox and Eleanor Ramsey. Eleanor Ramsey wrote this report which was edited by Dr Iain Ferris. The illustrations were prepared by John Halsted.

## **9.0 References**

BUFAU 2003 *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Watching Brief at City Hospital Grounds, Winson Green, Birmingham.*

Hislop, M. 2002 *The City Hospital Grounds, Winson Green, Birmingham: A Desk-Based Assessment.* BUFAU Report No. 1008

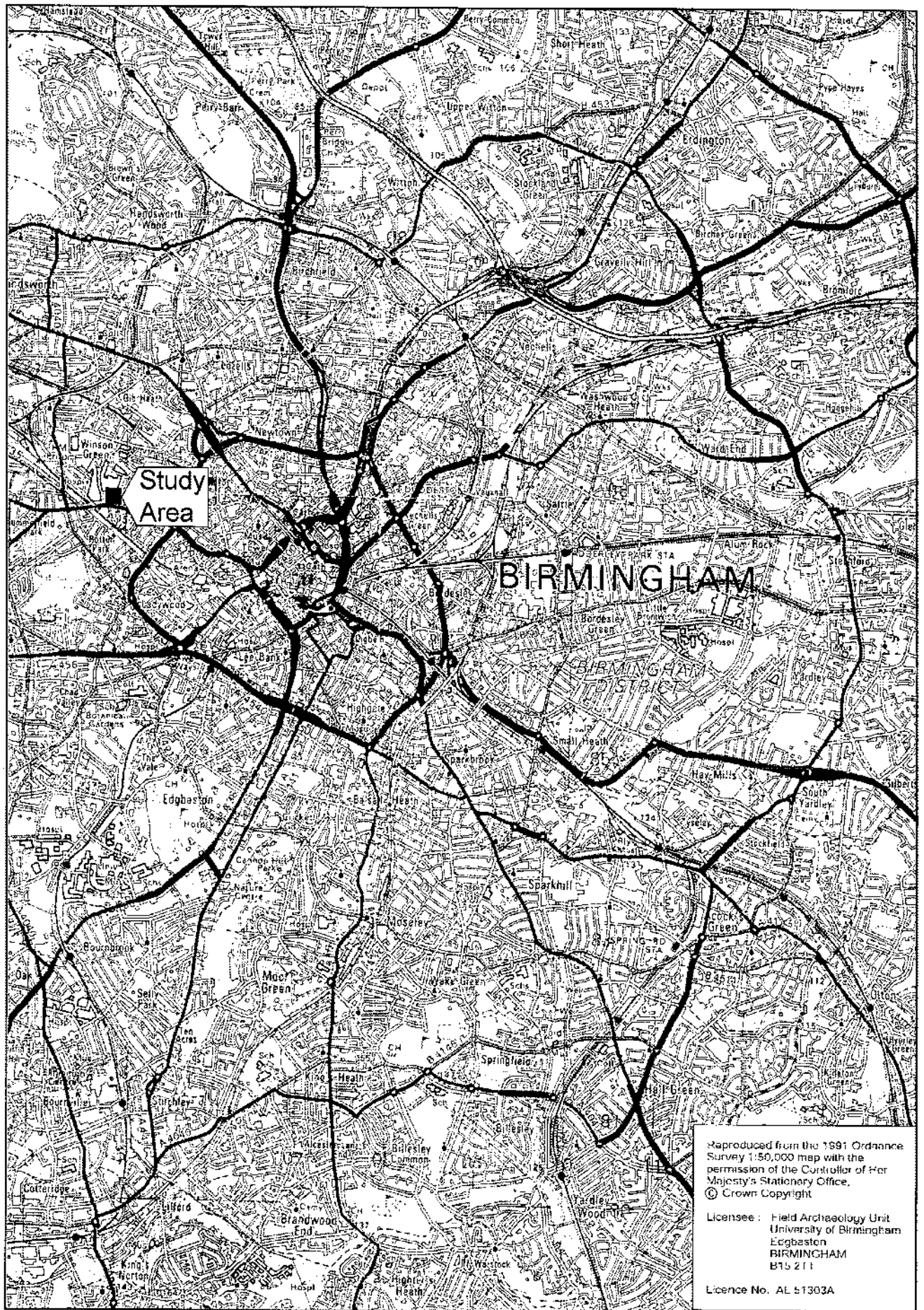


Fig.1 (Location Map)



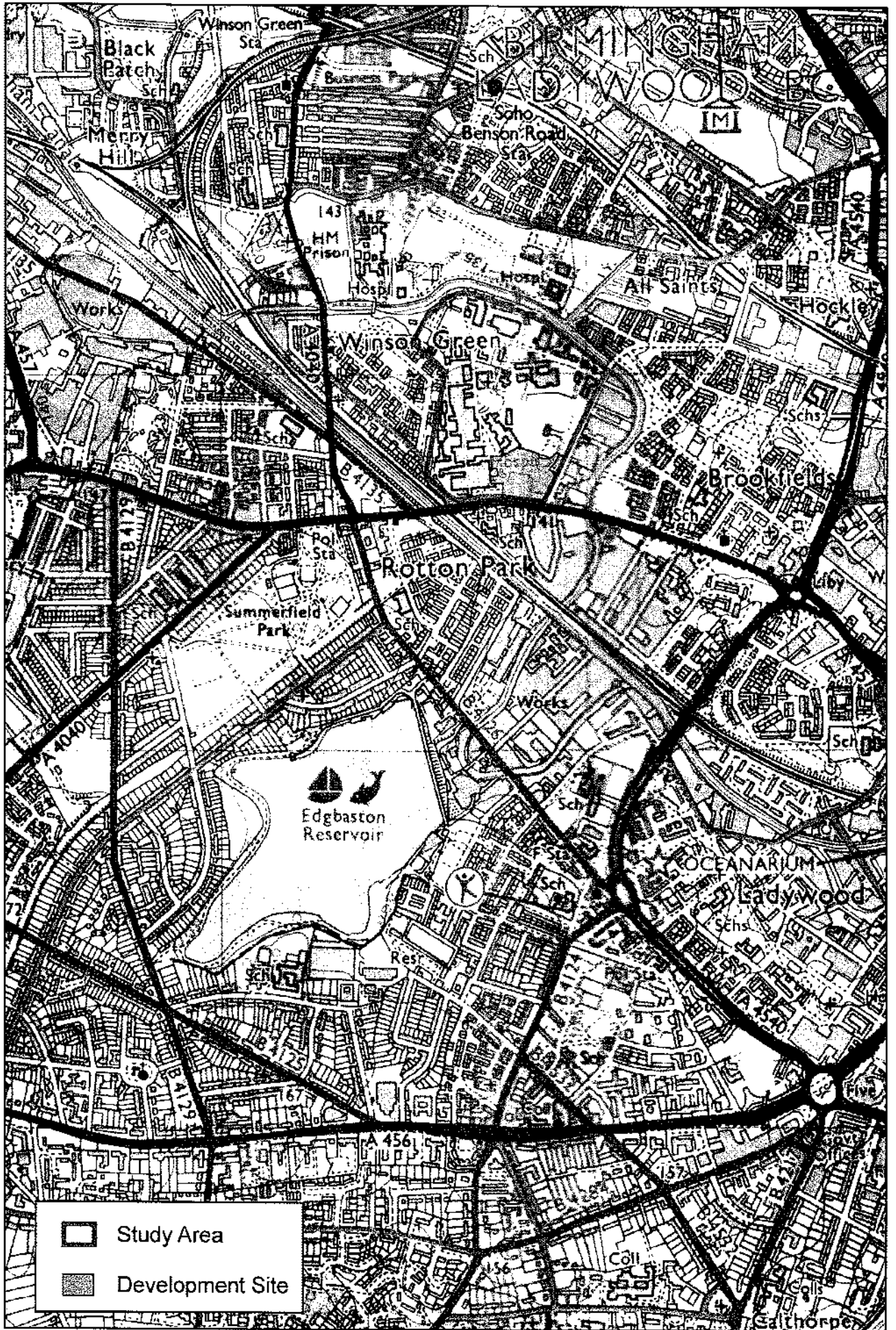


Fig.2 (Study Area and Development Site)

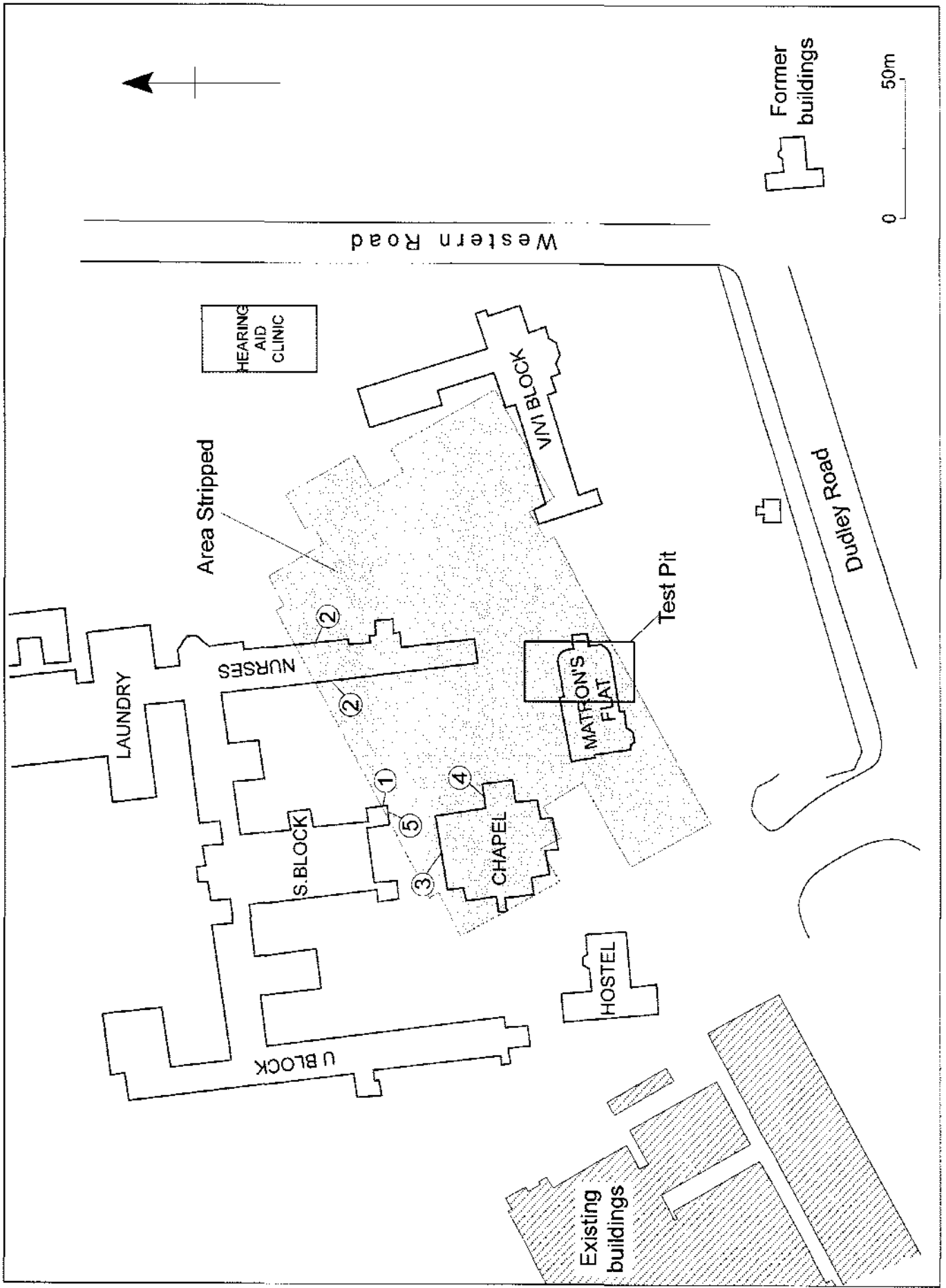


Fig.3

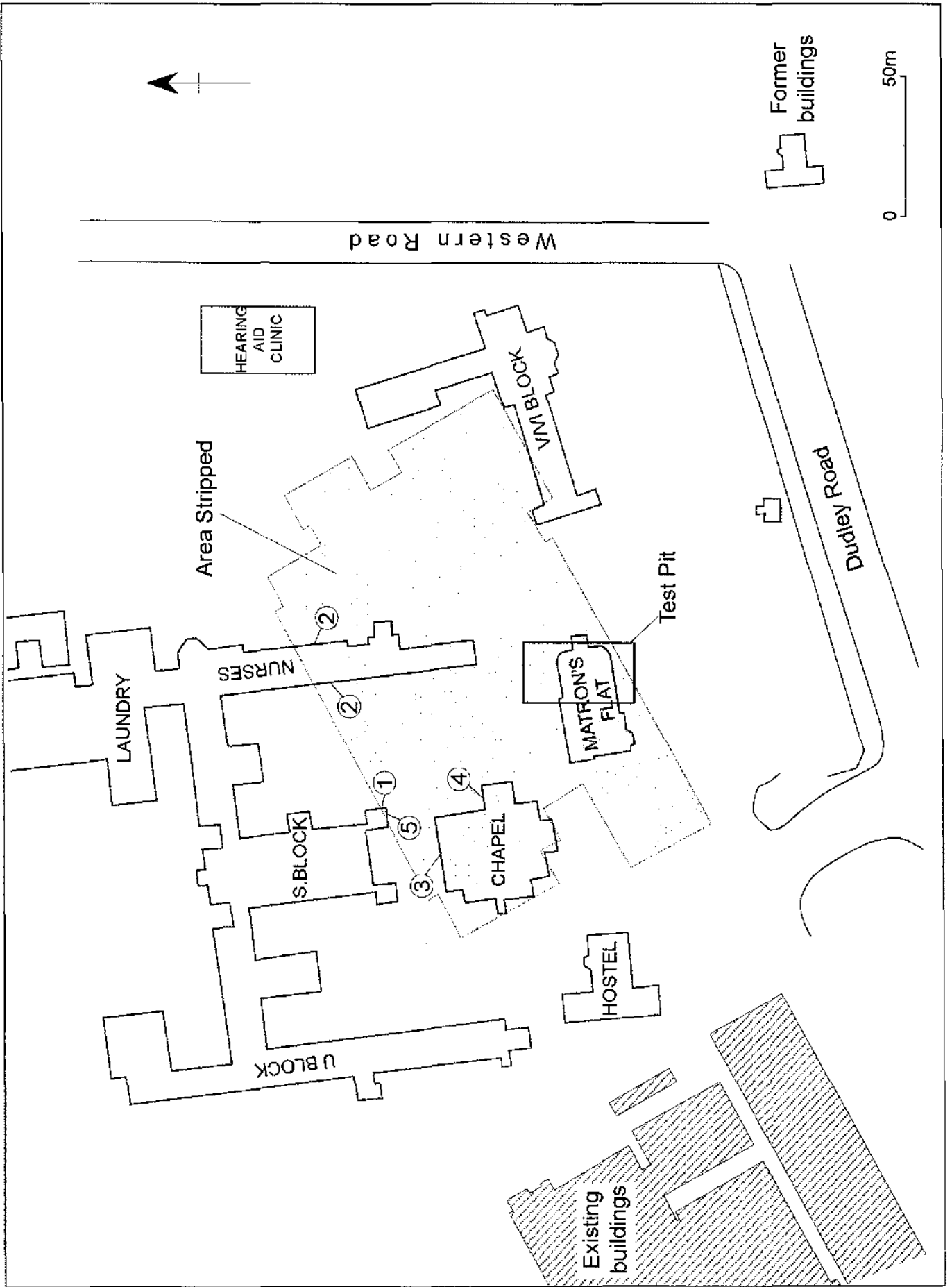


Fig.3



Plate 1