Land off Barston Lane, Solihull: an archaeological evaluation 2003

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1.0 Non-technical summary

An archaeological evaluation by means of geophysical survey and trial-trenching was undertaken during April 2003, within an area of agricultural land off Barston Lane, Solihull, (centred on NGR SP 168 787). The work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Birse Civils Limited. The evaluation was required by the archaeological advisor to Solihull M. B. C in advance of planning consent for a proposed site compound and the construction of an access road associated with roadworks on the A41 Solihull Bypass road. Subsequently, the site compound was sited at a different location. The purpose of the evaluation was to test for the survival of significant archaeological remains within the site, and to provide an indication of the importance, date and extent of such remains.

Previous archaeological work at the site comprised of a desk-top assessment (Bridgeman 1998) of existing archaeological knowledge, carried out prior to the construction of a water pipeline. The desk-top assessment shows that the area of the proposed site compound is situated within a field called 'brick kiln field' shown on the Tithe map of c.1840 AD (SMR 5789). This field name evidence suggested a pre 1840 AD brick kiln may survive at this location.

The geophysical survey located strong magnetic disturbance surrounded by magnetic debris. It was thought possible that this was associated with the presence of a brick kiln. Two archaeological trial-trenches, located to examine the areas of strong magnetic disturbance, were excavated. The results of the trial-trenching revealed that the natural sand and gravel subsoil had been heavily disturbed and contaminated by dumping of modern building debris and rubbish some of which was partly burnt. No evidence of a brick kiln was found and if such a feature existed it may have been located further north, on the underlying clay geology.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation, by means of geophysical survey and trial-trenching, carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU), of land off Barston Lane, Solihull (Fig. 1, hereafter referred to as the site). The work was carried out on behalf of Birse Civils Limited, in advance of a planning application submitted to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, for a proposed site compound and the construction of an access road associated with roadworks on the A41 Solihull Bypass road. Subsequently the proposed compound was built at an alternative location.

This evaluation is part of a programme of archaeological work recommended by Ed Wilson of Warwick Museum, archaeological advisor to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. The evaluation adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001). The project was carried out in accordance with PPG 16 (DoE 1990).

3.0 Site location and description (Fig. 1)

The field in which the site is located is north of Barston Lane, Solihull (centred on NGR SP 168 787), to the west of junction 5 of the M42 motorway. The site is bordered by Barston Lane and gardens of properties fronting Warwick Road to the south, open fields to the west, the A41 Solihull Bypass to the north and junction 5 of the M42 to the east.

The site covers an area of approximately 1.5ha hectares and comprises part of a field, currently left as rough pasture. The site is fairly flat with a height of approximately 123m above Ordnance Datum.

The underlying geology consists is predominately Keuper Marl with small zones of sand and gravel and alluvium adjacent to River Blythe.

4.0 Archaeological background

Prior to the evaluation, which is the subject of this report, assessment of the likely effects of the Birmingham to Solihull link main pipeline on the archaeology of the area was carried out by BUFAU (Bridgeman 1998). The assessment identified the possible location of a brick kiln suggested by the field name Brick Kiln Field (SMR 5789), in the Solihull Tithe Award of 1840. This site was deemed of local importance, particularly with related activity in the form of clay pits being present to the north (SMR 5751). A subsequent watching brief failed to reveal any associated archaeological features on the route of the pipeline.

5.0 Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- establish the likely presence or absence of any archaeological deposits and features within the site.
- define the nature, date, extent and significance of surviving deposits and features.
- provide information to allow the formulation of a mitigation scheme for further investigation in advance of topsoil stripping, where appropriate, or for other mitigation through scheme design etc.

These aims were achieved by carrying out geophysical survey and through the excavation of two archaeological trial-trenches. The trenches were located to test anomalies found by the geophysical survey.

6.0 Method

In order to achieve the aims of the evaluation a geophysical survey was carried out involving rapid scanning along 10m transects to identify any areas of strong magnetic disturbance. This was followed by detailed magnetometry with readings taken at 0.5m centres along 10m transects. Subsequently two northeast-southwest aligned trial-trenches,

20m in length and 1.8m wide, were excavated, covering a total of 72 sq. metres. The trial-trenches were surveyed-in using an EDM total station, and were designed to investigate magnetic anomalies recorded during the geophysical survey. A JCB mechanical excavator, fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket, was used to remove the topsoil and/or modern overburden.

Mechanical excavation was monitored by an archaeologist at all times. Machining ceased at the top of the uppermost archaeological deposit or at the top of the natural subsoil if no archaeological deposits were present. Subsequent cleaning and excavation was by hand.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by plans (at 1:20 and 1:50), sections (at 1:10 and 1:20), monochrome print and colour slide photography. The vertical stratigraphy of all trenches was recorded.

7.0 Summary of results (Fig. 2)
7.1 Geophysical survey

This section is only intended as a summary. The detailed results of the geophysical survey by Stratascan are contained within a separate report (Mercer 2003). The geophysical survey comprised of rapid magnetometer scanning over all of the area affected by the proposed compound and subsequent detailed magnetometry. The initial scanning revealed an area of strong magnetic disturbance. Subsequent detailed magnetometry identified the focus of the disturbance surrounded by a scatter of magnetic debris.

7.2 Trial-trenching
Trench 1 (Plate 1)

The natural sand and gravel subsoil (1001) was revealed at a depth of 0.30m below the present ground surface. It was disturbed by recent activity and modern finds including large amounts of charcoal, brick, tile, glass, a wooden fence post and barbed wire, were pressed into the upper surface of 1001. This was overlain by 0.30m of topsoil (1000) which contained modern ceramics, brick, modern glass, modern iron objects and charcoal.

Trench 2 (Plate 2)

The natural sand and gravel subsoil (2001) was revealed at a depth of 0.45m below the present ground surface. This was overlain by 0.45m of topsoil (2000) which contained modern ceramics and brick.

8.0 The finds
The only finds recovered during the trial-trenching were of modern date. These were not retained.

9.0 Discussion

The results of the trial-trenching demonstrated that the magnetic anomalies located by geophysical survey are caused by modern disturbance possibly associated with the

construction of the Solihull Bypass. This disturbance in the form of modern building debris and rubbish, some of which was partly burnt, was particularly apparent in Trench 1, but it obviously caused magnetic disturbance over a wider area. The possible brick kiln suggested by the field name, may lie at another location, perhaps further to the north. The natural subsoil underlying the site, at what would have been the south part of Brick Kiln Field, as depicted on the 1840 Tithe Map, was not marl, but sand and gravel. Consequently this would presumably not be a suitable location for a brick kiln and associated clay pits.

10.0 Acknowledgements

The project was managed and directed by Laurence Jones and was carried out with the assistance of Robert Bracken, and Kate Bain. The project was monitored by the archaeological advisor to Solihull MBC, Ed Wilson, Archaeologist for Warwickshire Museum.

11.0 References

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Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001 *Standard and guidance for Field Evaluation*

Mercer, E. 2003 *M42 Proposed BIRSE Project Offices. Nr. Solihull.* Stratascan report 1755


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SITE
SOLIHULL
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Fig.1

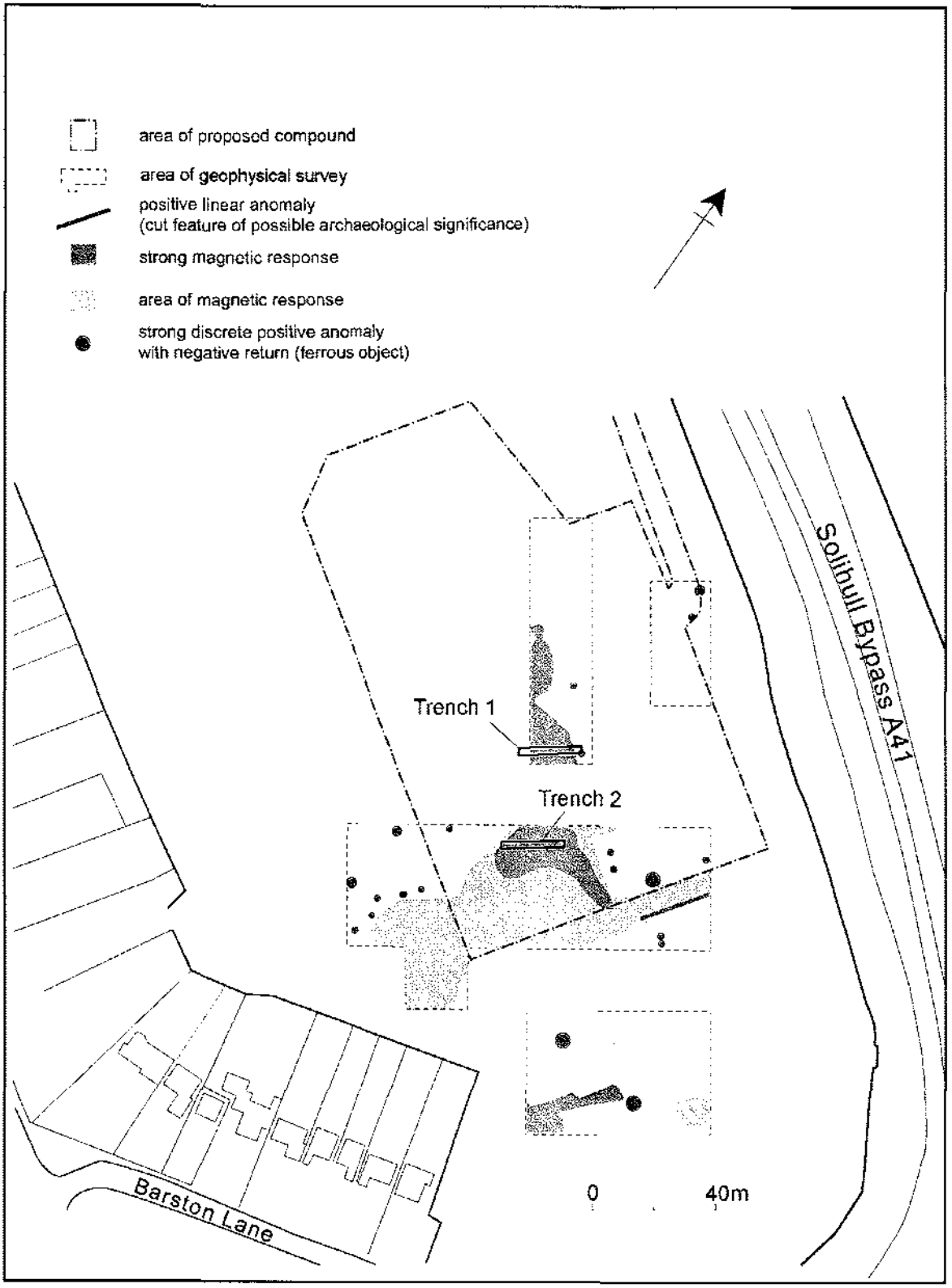
area of proposed compound
area of geophysical survey
positive linear anomaly
(cut feature of possible archaeological significance)
strong magnetic response
area of magnetic response
strong discrete positive anomaly
with negative return (ferrous object)
Trench 1
Trench 2
Solihull Bypass A41
Barston Lane
0
40m

Fig.2

Plate 1

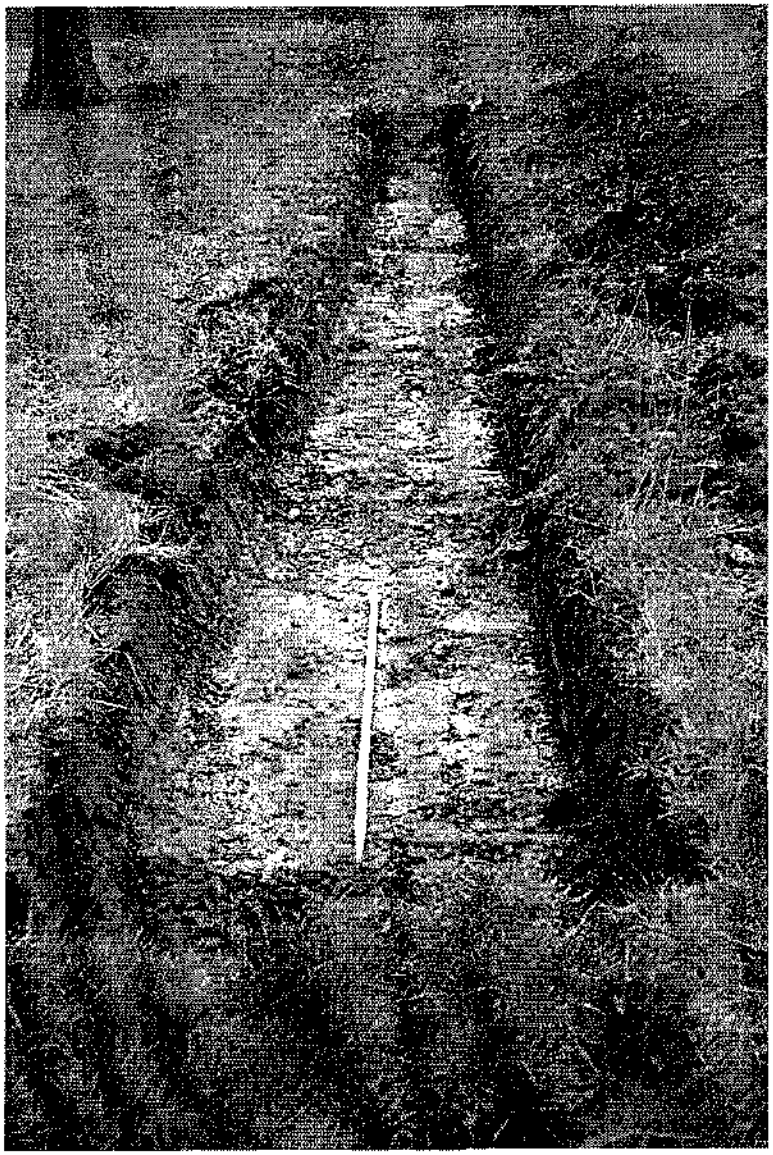

Plate 2