Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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IT Centre, University of Wolverhampton, West Midlands. An Archaeological Evaluation 2003

by
Emma Hancox

With contributions from Annette Hancocks

For further information please contact:
Alex Jones (Director)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: bufau@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: http://www.anth-arch.bham.ac.uk/bufau

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Summary
An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in the centre courtyard of the campus at Wolverhampton University in April 2003 (NGR SO 915 988). HBG Construction commissioned the work on behalf of Wolverhampton University prior to the construction of a new IT centre. Following recommendations in the desk-based assessment three trenches were dug in the courtyard to investigate whether any evidence of the medieval settlement and the possible Anglo-Saxon town boundary ditch remained. The excavations revealed that any medieval and Saxon deposits had been truncated. Trenches 1 and 2 contained cellars, probably connected with a twentieth century building, which were cut into the sandstone bedrock. In Trench 3, layers of re-deposited natural and post-medieval build-up overlay the natural. Several post-medieval features were cut into the natural in this trench. No evidence of earlier occupation was identified.

1.0 Introduction

This report details the results of trial trenching at Wolverhampton University. The evaluation was undertaken in advance of a programme of building and followed a desk-based assessment carried out in 2002 (Conway 2002). Three trenches were excavated in the centre courtyard of the campus (NGR SO 915 988). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned by HBG Construction on behalf of Wolverhampton University to carry out the work, which was undertaken in April 2003.

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a brief prepared by the Black Country Archaeologist (Shaw 2003) and a written scheme of investigation prepared by BUFAU (Coates 2003).

2.0 Site Location

The main campus of the University of Wolverhampton lies in the centre of the city and is defined by Wulfruna Street, St. Peter's Square, Ring Road St. Peter's and Stafford Street (Figs. 1 and 2). The proposed development lies within the Inner Courtyard to the rear of the University's MA block (Fig. 2). The University's main campus lies to the north of St. Peter's Church, around which the medieval town was centred.

3.0 Geology and Topography

Wolverhampton city centre lies on a promontory, reaching up to 150-159m A.O.D., which is part of a chain of high ground which stretches between Cannock in Staffordshire, to the Clent Hills, Worcestershire (White 1997, 2). St. Peter's Church stands on the highest point of the promontory and the surrounding land slopes away very steeply to its west and northwest and more gently on the northeast, east and south sides. The area under evaluation lies 100m north of St. Peter's Church, on ground which slopes gently away from the church. The underlying geology of Wolverhampton city centre is composed of glacial sands, sands and gravels and pebble beds intermixed with sandy clays and outcrops of sandstone (*ibid*).

4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

There is little evidence, other than a few chance finds of doubtful provenance, for settlement activity within the Wolverhampton area prior to the late Saxon period (White and Wade 1997, 2). It has been argued that the promontory on which Wolverhampton stands was the site of an Iron Age hillfort. A circuit of earthwork defences encircling the highest point of the promontory has been inferred from street names, boundaries and plot patterns visible on historic maps of the town (e.g. Hooke and Slater 1986, Baker 1980). Slater argues that this circuit represents the remains of defences belonging to an Iron Age hillfort. The evaluation lies within the proposed earthwork circuit, evidence of this may survive below ground.

Evidence from charters shows that a settlement and Minster church, St Peter's, existed at Wolverhampton by the later tenth century (Hooke and Slater 1986, 10 & 14). The location, nature and extent of the late Saxon settlement at Wolverhampton is unclear as little archaeological evidence from this period has yet been found in the city. The proposed earthwork circuit around the hilltop, discussed above, has also been attributed to an Anglo-Saxon origin (Baker 1980, Mike Shaw *pers. comm.*). Research into Anglo-Saxon charters has demonstrated that some of the main streets of medieval and later Wolverhampton, including Stafford Street, were established by this period and that they were part of a wider network of cross-country routes in this part of the midlands (Hooke and Slater 1986, 35-7). The evaluation lies near the probable focal point of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, the Minster church, immediately to the rear of one of the major routes into the settlement, Stafford Street, and within the proposed earthwork circuit. The area, therefore, probably saw activity or settlement in the later Saxon period.

Wolverhampton was divided into two estates in the medieval period: a religious manor, the Deanery, and a royal manor, Stowheath. The Deanery manor was established to serve St. Peter's Church and was centred on the Deanery Hall. By the thirteenth century, borough status had been granted to the Deanery manor and this gradually came to apply to the Stowheath manor (White and Wade 1997, 3). The evaluation area lies within the Deanery Manor and a short distance to the northeast of the site of the former Deanery Hall. Wolverhampton had become a prosperous market town by the later medieval period, due to its important role in the wool trade (Upton 1998, 17). The built-up area of the later medieval town extended from the central area around St. Peter's Church and the market place, along all the major routes into the town, including Stafford Street. A model of the probable sequence of development of Wolverhampton has been proposed, using historic maps of the town. It is argued that the earliest settlement was focused on the high ground around St. Peter's Church, at the point where the routes into the town converged, with settlement subsequently spreading outwards along these routes as the town prospered (Baker 1980). The evaluation lies very close to the core of the medieval settlement of Wolverhampton.

Wolverhampton became increasingly industrialised from the later eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. Large industries, such as iron production, became established on the outskirts of the town. Many smaller-scale industrial processes, such as lock making and japanning, became established within the town itself. Growing industrialisation in the nineteenth century led to the infilling of open areas in the town with small works and shopping areas to accommodate these trades

and with back-to-back housing for the workers and their families. This increasingly dense building and occupation led to the degeneration of many areas of the town into slums by the middle of the nineteenth century. The evaluation area was one of these areas. Evidence of post-medieval small-scale industry may be preserved below ground.

The twentieth century saw large-scale re-developments of the town centre. One element of the re-development was the clearance of slum areas within the town, including part of the area under evaluation. The University of Wolverhampton was created in the 1990s from the former buildings of the Wolverhampton and Staffordshire Technical College (Black Country SMR No. 13216). The establishment of the university and the construction of many buildings as part of its expansion since the late 1990s has led to the development of an inner-city campus in Wolverhampton.

Maps dating from 1780 show the area under evaluation. They show that a substantial amount of building has occurred within what is now the centre courtyard of the university during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the desk-based assessment (Conway 2002) suggested that the foundations to these buildings may not have been deep enough to destroy all the archaeology and that deposits may survive in 'islands' across the site.

There has been a fair amount of previous fieldwork in the area. Watching briefs carried out in the area of the Deanery and in Lichfield St found post-medieval structural remains (SMR 2555 and 1708), and an evaluation carried out by BUFAU (Hughes and Sterenberg 1995) behind the Art Gallery also found that post-medieval foundations had truncated any earlier deposits. Medieval archaeology located within the city centre was discovered located under the base of the Saxon Cross in St. Peter's Graveyard (Hughes and Buteux 1992). More recent excavations carried out prior to redevelopment within the university uncovered human remains from the overflow graveyard to St. Peter's (Duncan 2002; Neilson and Coates *in prep*.). The area under evaluation just outside this graveyard.

5.0 Aims

The general aim of the evaluation was to characterise the nature, extent and date of any archaeological deposits encountered.

More specific aims were to identify:

- any evidence of medieval settlement relating to properties fronting onto Stafford Street, and
- the location and date of the possible Anglo-Saxon or Iron-Age boundary ditch.

6.0 Methodology

Three trenches were excavated using a 13 tonne 360° wheeled excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the uppermost archaeological horizon or the subsoil. Excavations beyond a safe depth in Trenches 1 and 2 were facilitated by the battered nature of the trenches. Any features encountered were hand dug by qualified archaeologists.

All statigraphic sequences were recorded even where no archaeology was present. Sections were drawn at 1:20 and each trench was planned at 1:50. Photographs were

taken in both black and white print and colour slide. Finds were collected, washed, marked, bagged and conserved as appropriate. Any contexts suitable for environmental analysis were sampled. A comprehensive written record was maintained by means of printed *pro-forma* context and feature cards.

In light of observations made during previous excavations on the campus, it was anticipated that modern demolition debris would be present. It was therefore proposed to retain only a selective and representative sample of later building materials. However, all ceramics and small finds were retained during the evaluation. The site archive comprises of all artifactual and ecofactual remains from the site. The archive for this evaluation is currently stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

There was a slim possibility of human remains being encountered given the proximity of the area to St. Peter's overflow graveyard. Any human remains recovered during the evaluation were to be recorded *in-situ* and excavated in accordance with Home Office guidelines.

7.0 The Results of the Trial Trenching

7.1 Trench 1
Natural sandstone bedrock (1005) was encountered at a depth of *c.*1.75m below the current ground level. Cut into the bedrock was a large cellar. The 8-10cm thick concrete floor (1004) of the cellar lay directly on the bedrock. The cellar covered the entire trench with a wall being visible running along the eastern edge of the trench (Plate 1; Fig. 3). The wall (F100/1003) was made of modern red-bricks (24 x 11 x 7cm). 14 courses remained standing. The cellar was filled with a brick rubble layer (1002) containing large blocks of broken wall. This layer contained twentieth century rubbish including plastic bags (these were not retained). The rubble was up to 1.25m deep. Above this was a layer of hardcore (1001) *c.*0.4-0.6m deep, underlying the pavement (1000).

7.2 Trench 2
Any potential archaeological deposits in this trench was also have been truncated by a large cellar. Natural bedrock (2006) was encountered below the cellar floor at a depth of *c.*2m below the surface. The cellar floor (2003) was made of concrete c.6-8cm thick. The walls were visible in both the east and west sections of this trench (F200/2004 and F201/2005, Plates 2 and 3, Fig. 3). The cellar was filled with brick rubble (2002) up to 1.5m deep, containing twentieth century rubbish, including advertising signs and a lawn mower. Above this was a layer of hardcore c.0.4-0.6m deep (2001) underlying the pavement (2000).

7.3 Trench 3
Natural sand (3003) was located at *c.*1.1-1.35m below the surface (Plates 4 and 5). A sondage machine dug into the natural found bedrock at a depth of *c.*1.8m below ground level. Cut into the natural were several features. F301 (Fig 4, Section 2; Plate 6) was a very large pit *c.*1.8m wide by more than 1.9m long. It had steep sides and a flat base and was *c.*0.6m deep. The base of the pit was lined with a single layer of tiles (3011, Plate 6). The bottom fill (3010) was a mid brown soft sand, 0.2-0.5m deep, containing a small amount of charcoal flecking. Pottery and tile were

recovered. A dark brown sandy fill (3009) overlay 3010, this was up to 0.4m deep and contained a fair amount of charcoal/clinker. Pottery was recovered from this context. Overlying this was a layer of re-deposited natural (3008) in the eastern edge of the pit *c.*0.2m deep.

F300 was a smaller pit *c.*1.1m in diameter and up to 0.3m deep, the sides were concave and the base flat (Plate 7). It was filled with a mixed mid-brown sand containing patches of soft red sand and black clinker material (3004). Charcoal flecking was present throughout. Post-medieval pottery, brick and tile were recovered from this context. F300 was cut by F302.

F302 (Plate 8) was a linear feature running north to south, along the eastern edge of the trench. It was more than 0.8m wide with vertical sides and a flat base. It was cut into natural, and through F300 and F303. It contained a single mixed mid/dark brown silty sand containing patches of soft, red sand and clinker (3005). Charcoal flecking was present throughout the fill, along with post-medieval pottery, brick and tile.

F303 (Plate 8) was a pit similar in size and fill to F300. It had vertical sides and a flat base. The fill (3006) was a mixed mid/light brown sand containing patches of soft red sand and a small amount of clinker. A small amount of post-medieval pottery was recovered.

All these features were underlying a layer of re-deposited natural (3002) which was up to 0.4m deep. Overlying this, in the north east corner of the trench, was a layer of dark brown/black silty sand containing patches of red sand and a fairly large amount of charcoal (3007; Fig. 4 Section 1), this was *c.*0.6m deep. Above this was a layer of bricks and compacted sand (3001) *c.*0.4-0.5m deep, forming a foundation for the overlying asphalt (3000).

8.0 Finds by Annette Hancocks

All of the finds were rapidly scanned and were quantified by count and weight (g), Table 1. This enabled the assemblage to be spot-dated and the nature and extent of the finds assemblage to be characterised. All of the finds were recovered from evaluation Trench 3.

A total of 33 sherds (792g) of post-medieval pottery was recovered. The material comprised blackwares, trailed slip wares, manganese wares, mottled wares and yellow wares of eighteenth/nineteenth century date. There was no evidence for medieval or Saxon material amongst the assemblage.

The finds archive comprises seven assemblage summary sheets and one small box of finds. These will be deposited with the appropriate Museum, once the ownership of finds has been confirmed.

Material/ Context	Tile: Ceramic	Brick: Ceramic	Post-medieval pottery	Clay pipe	Animal bone	Iron nail	Worked stone	Coal	Vessel glass	Spot-dating
Tr.3 Cleaning	1 (8g)	-	6 (112g)	-	-	-	-	-	-	18th/19th century, includes trailed slip ware and blackware with 20th century ceramic tile
Tr. 3 3004 (F300) Small Pit	-	1 (79g)	5 (21g)	2 (14g)	-	-	-	-	1 (9g)	18th/19th blackware and manganese ware with intrusive 20th material
Tr. 3 3005 (F302) Linear	-	-	1 (56g)	1 (3g)	<1g	-	-	-	1 (2g)	18th/19th century blackware
Tr. 3 3006 (F303) Small Pit	-	-	2 (10g)	1 (2g)	-	-	-	-	-	19th/20thcentury creamware
Tr. 3 3009 (F301) Large Pit	20 (1441g)	2 (422g)	12 (396g)	2 (12g)	97g	-	1 (98g)	14g	4 (46g)	18th/19thcentury creamware, blackwares and mottled wares and yellow ware. Clay pipe bowl with stamp 'w'
Tr. 3 3010 (F301) Large Pit	5 (678g)	3 (97g)	7 (197g)	2 (1g)	62g	1 (12g)	-	-	2 (16g)	18th/19th century, includes blackware, creamware and manganese ware. Clay pipe bowl with damaged stamp.
Tr. 3 3011 (F301) Large Pit	4 (2126g)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Tiles lining to pit
TOTALS	**30 (4261g)**	**6 (598g)**	**33 (792g)**	**8 (32g)**	**160g**	**1 (12g)**	**1 (98g)**	**14g**	**8 (73g)**	

Table 1

9.0 Discussion

The evaluation found that any evidence of Anglo-Saxon or medieval settlement which may have been present in the area may have been truncated away by nineteenth and twentieth century activity. In Trenches 1 and 2 cellars had destroyed all traces of pre-twentieth century activity. There is a building visible on the 1938 and 1957 Ordnance Survey maps running north to south where Trenches 1 and 2 were excavated (see Conway 2002; Figs. 9 & 10). This building does not appear on the 1919 map but is present on the 1938 and 1957 maps. It is likely that the cellars discovered in Trenches 1 and 2 relate to this building as the brick work was of a modern type and the rubbish mixed in with the demolition layer (1002, in Trench 1, and 2002, in Trench 2) was mid/late twentieth century in date.

The features found in Trench 3 were all post-medieval in date. The large pit F301 probably dates to the eighteenth or nineteenth century. It was lined with tiles and may relate to some sort of industrial activity on the site. The other features also date to this time and may be related to F301. None of the features can be associated with a specific function.

Given the substantial amount of building work carried out in the area over the last hundred and fifty years, it seems unlikely that any below-ground archaeology will have survived. However, it is possible that very small areas containing earlier

deposits still remain, which were not picked up in this evaluation, in between the later disturbance.

10.0 Acknowledgements
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