25-27 Heath Mill Lane, Deritend, Birmingham Archaeological Evaluation 2004

Project No. 1168

25-27 Heath Mill Lane, Deritend, Birmingham
Archaeological Evaluation
2004

By Eleanor Ramsey

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation on land at 25-27 Heath Mill Lane, Deritend, Birmingham was commissioned by SPE ARchitecture Ltd on behalf of Taylor-Hart Limited. The work was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in March 2004 prior to the proposed redevelopment of the site.

Previous archaeological work conducted in the area suggested that the potential survival of archaeological remains was high, and features and deposits dating to the 13th century onwards of both domestic and industrial nature may exist within the site boundaries.

The evaluation identified two large features dated to the Medieval period that survived beneath the current building, possibly representing a clay pit and a ditch. Fragments of locally produced Deritend ware and cooking pots dating to the 13th – 14th century were recovered from these features. Within the yard area outside the current building, the remains of truncated pits and post-holes were identified beneath a grey cobbled layer. No dating evidence was recovered from this layer during the evaluation, however, the layer was similar enough to bear comparison with a similar layer dated to the 17th century that had been identified during archaeological works at the Old Crown located to the west of the current site. This layer was present throughout the trial trench located in the yard, implying that the survival of pre-17th century deposits and features in this area of the site is good.

The evaluation further demonstrated that the drains and wall foundations associated with the modern building are unlikely to have severely truncated the extensive below ground archaeological remains.

1.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken on land at 25-27 Heath Mill Lane, Deritend, Birmingham. The work was carried out by Birmingham Archaeology and commissioned by SPE ARchitecture Ltd on behalf of Taylor-Hart Limited to provide archaeological information in advanced of the proposed redevelopment of the site.

The archaeological work complied with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (2004) and a Brief prepared by Dr Michael Hodder, the Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council.

2.0 Site Location (Fig. 1)

The site is bounded by Heath Mill Lane to the west, a surfaced car park to the north, a surfaced car park to the south and an existing building and yard to the east. The east part of the site is currently occupied by a recent building, which is now vacant but

was formerly a car repair shop and attached office. The west part of the site is a surfaced former parking area.

3.0 Archaeological Background (Figs. 2 and 3)

The site was included in an archaeological desk-based assessment of the whole of the Digbeth/High Street Deritend/High Street Bordesley frontage in 1995. This suggested that the existing open area around 25 Heath Mill Lane could have high potential for the survival of archaeological remains, including remains of pottery manufacture and metalworking. The desk-based assessment stated that the site had high potential for the survival of archaeological remains from the Medieval period onwards, together with evidence for the past environmental conditions.

The previous desk-based assessment also highlighted the potential of the area to shed light on its development from the medieval period onwards, in particular relating to local tanning and pottery industries. Excavation in the very near vicinity of the proposed development area has confirmed that archaeological survival is generally good here in the bottom of the valley of the River Rea with deposits ranging in date from the 13th to 19th century. Where not disturbed by later building work upper archaeological horizons may be expected within less than a metre of the existing ground surface.

Archaeological information from nearby sites gives an indication of the likely archaeological remains on this site. To the south, excavations in the yard of the Old Crown in 1994 revealed misfired pottery indicating the existence of a pottery kiln on or near the site in the 13th or 14th centuries. To the west, excavations between Gibb Street and Heath Mill Lane in 2000 revealed 13th-14th century occupation, 17th and 18th century pits dug to extract clay and 18th century leather-tanning pits and wells.

4.0 Historical Review *By Steve Litherland*

A rapid review has been made of readily available historic mapping for the proposed development area. This ranges in date from 1731 to the later 20th century, and a basic timeline for the site may be proposed as follows:

Medieval period

The Medieval development of Deritend probably began around 1200 as a rival market to Birmingham based around houses and plots focused on the road frontage just above the river crossing. It was rapidly subsumed into the lordship of Birmingham by 1270. The plot pattern of Deritend exhibits a certain regularity that is indicative of deliberate planning. There is a regular backline to the properties fronting the south side of the High Street and the plot pattern on the north side is also regular, but noticeably wider behind the Old Crown plot, tapering markedly as it progresses in a easterly direction up the hill towards Bordesley. There is documentation for the Old Crown plot dating back as far as the late 14th century, although the house itself dates to around 1500. Heath Mill Lane was in existence from at least the 16th century, and led to a water mill a little further downstream the Rea that was bounded by water meadows here. The proposed development site lies within the backplot of the Old Crown plot, in a

location close to ready supplies of water, potting clay, a market and transport route that would be particularly attractive to a Medieval potter, and also to tanners (cf. Medieval production in Park Street and Edgbaston Street).

Post-medieval period

The layout to the rear of the Old Crown probably did not alter much in its basic form to that outlined for the Medieval period above. Eighteenth-century mapping continues to show a pattern of housing along the High Street frontage, with small enclosures or plantations and the odd isolated building behind, before opening out on to meadows (Fig. 2). This situation was only changed in the 19th century after the arrival of the canals and later, in 1850, the railway. Lower Trinity Street just to the north of the proposed development plot was cut by 1825, but the land behind the Old Crown plot is still depicted as being empty. The railway viaduct cut the very back of the Old Crown plot, and was doggedly opposed by Joshua Toulmin-Smith, Birmingham historian and at that time owner of the Old Crown. Reluctance to develop the plot may have been due to a combination of anxiety concerning the exact route of the railway and the conservative attitude of Toulmin-Smith, although plots between the north side of the High Street and the canal were still being developed into the 1860s and 1870s, so perhaps the later 19th century development of the present day proposed development area is not that unusual. A second viaduct was also built to the south of the earlier one in the early 1900s to bring traffic into the newly built Moor Street passenger and goods station.

Certainly by 1889 a typically small-scale 'family-business-sized' factory is depicted on the first edition 25 inch edition of the Ordnance Survey (Fig. 3). This had a central covered cart entrance onto Heath Mill Lane and a central courtyard flanked by outbuildings or workshops behind. The footprint of this factory corresponds exactly to the boundaries of the present day proposed development area. At present it cannot be determined exactly what the factory produced, but contemporary trade directories should show this when they are consulted. This layout continued into the 1920s and '30s until the outline of the present garage structure is shown on the provisional Ordnance Survey edition of 1940, but still approached through the covered cart entrance off Heath Mill Lane. This was subsequently pulled down in the post-war era to create the present site.

5.0 Objectives

The objectives of the archaeological work were to:

- Establish the presence or absence of any archaeological deposits and features within the proposed development site.
- Define the nature, extent and significance of surviving deposits and features.
- Provide information to allow the formulation of a mitigation scheme for any further work in advance of development, where appropriate.

In particular, the objectives of the archaeological work were to address:

- The likely survival of remains of domestic activity and industrial processes from the medieval period onwards, in the form of structures and/or residues

- The likely survival of remains of past environmental conditions
- The potential of the site to contribute to an understanding of the historic development of this part of Birmingham.

6.0 Method (Fig. 4)

Two trenches were excavated, one aligned north-west south-east within the confines of the yard, and one aligned north south inside the existing garage building. These were located to the centre of the plot to maximise the area sampled and to avoid electric and gas services. The concrete and overburden was mechanically removed by a JCB, under direct archaeological supervision, to the top of the uppermost archaeological deposit, or natural subsoil where no archaeological deposits were encountered. The exposed horizon was defined and hand cleaned as necessary. A representative sample of all significant archaeological deposits was excavated in order to understand the structural record and stratigraphic relationships of deposits.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, and a comprehensive written record was maintained on *pro-forma* context and feature cards. Contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings (at a scale of 1:20 and 1:50), and black and white, colour slide and print photography. These, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive.

7.0 Results

Trench 1 (Fig. 5)
Aligned north-north-west south-south-east, approximately 5.5m long, located inside the garage building.

The mixed yellow clay and red silt sand gravel natural subsoil (1004) was identified at a depth of approximately 0.6m below the modern ground surface. A large cut (F100) was identified cutting the natural subsoil at the southern end of the trench. This cut (F100) was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.8m, though was not fully excavated for health and safety reasons. The fill (1005) was a dark brown black silty clay with some small stones and charcoal fragments. A second cut (F103) was identified at the northern end of the trench, and may represent the northern edge of the same feature, suggesting the overall width of this feature was approximately 4.2m. This cut (F103) was also excavated to a maximum depth of 1.8m and again, was not fully excavated due to health and safety reasons. The fill of cut F103 (1007) was a grey silty clay with numerous stones and some charcoal and was similar in composition, though lighter in colour, to 1005. Medieval pottery was recovered from both 1005 and 1007.

Cutting F100 and F103 was a linear feature (F105). This feature was approximately 3.3m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.8m. This feature appeared to be aligned roughly north east-south west and the fill (1010) was an orange pink silty sandy clay with many stones and some charcoal flecking. Medieval pottery was also recovered from this feature.

Truncating the top of F105 was a shallow cut (F102), possibly representing a shallow pit. This cut was approximately 1.2m in diameter and 0.12m deep and was roughly bowl shaped. It was filled with dark grey clay-silt with post-medieval pottery, brick and tiles (1009). Cutting the top of F100, a second shallow pit was identified (F101). This feature (F101) was approximately 1m in diameter and 0.26m deep. The fill (1006) was a dark brown black silty-clay containing numerous stones and post-medieval pottery.

A layer of red brick and tile with yellow and grey sand (1003) was identified at the northern end of the trench, sealing F102 and F105. Overlying this layer, and also sealing features F100, F101, F103 and the natural subsoil (1004) was a deep layer of black sandy clay silt with much ash and coke (1002). This layer was approximately 0.55m deep and was present throughout the trench. Cutting this layer (1002) at the southern end of the trench was a sub-circular pit (F104), approximately 0.86m wide and 0.16m deep. The fill (1008) was a dark black clay with much charcoal and many fragments of brick and tile. Several drain cuts were also present, cutting layer 1002.

Sealing layer 1002, feature F101 and the drain cuts was a layer of yellow and red sand (1001) that acted as a levelling deposit for a layer of bricks and concrete (1000) that was present throughout the trench.

Trench 2 (Fig. 6)
Aligned north-west south-east, approximately 10.5m long, located in the yard outside the garage building.

The mixed red and yellow clay and gravel natural subsoil was identified at a depth of approximately 0.9m below the modern ground surface at the north-western end of the trench, and 0.7m below the modern ground surface at the south-eastern end of the trench.

Cutting the natural subsoil at the south-eastern end of the trench were a series of small sub-circular post-holes (F202, F203, F213 and F214). These were approximately 0.1m to 0.2m in diameter, and two were excavated, approximately 0.14m deep (F202 and F203). The fills of these features comprised a mottled light grey silt and yellow sand (2007 and 2008 respectively). Also identified at the south-eastern end of the trench was a highly irregular shallow scoop with a possible post hole central to it (F201). The fill of this feature (2006) was a light grey sandy silt with many cobbles that was very similar in composition to the overlying layer, 2003.

A series of three irregular post holes were identified in a sondage excavated against the north-east facing section (F209, F210 and F211). These ranged in diameter between 0.35m and 0.5m, and were between 0.14m and 0.28m deep. The fills of these features (2013, 2014 and 2016 respectively) were similar and comprised a dark grey silty sand with occasional stones.

Another small sub-circular post hole was identified to the south of these features (F204). This post hole was 0.35m wide and 0.08m deep and was filled with a black sandy silt with white mortar and occasional small brick fragments (2009). A small sub-rectangular pit (F206) was also identified in this area, measuring approximately 0.38m wide, 0.78m long and 0.14m deep. This feature had a V-shaped profile and

dark grey sandy-silt fill (2011). Adjacent to F204 and F206 was a shallow, irregular scoop (F205) that was filled with a light grey sandy silt with many stones (2010). This fill was similar to the overlying layer 2003, and may represent a depression in the natural subsoil rather than a discrete feature.

Sealing these features and the natural subsoil was a layer of grey sandy silt with many cobbles (2003). This layer increased in depth towards the north and east of the trench (0.16m to 0.4m), suggesting that it may represent a levelling deposit. This layer was partially removed by machine, and partially hand-excavated, though no finds were recovered from it.

A small, sub-rectangular pit (F200) was identified cutting F201 and layer 2003. This feature was 0.7m wide and 0.2m deep with a roughly V-shaped profile. The fill (2005) was a mottled grey and orange silty sand with some stones. Tile, clay pipe and glass fragments were recovered from this feature.

Two small pits were identified cutting layer 2003, central to Trench 2 (F207 and F208). F207 was sub-square in plan, and approximately 0.54m wide and 0.2m deep with sloping sides and a flat base. The fill of this feature was a loose black silty sand with patches of orange sand and much coke and charcoal (2012). Fragments of pottery and clay pipe were recovered from this feature. The second pit (F208) was sub-rectangular in plan, and was approximately 0.45m wide and 0.15m deep. The fill was a mottled grey silt and orange sand with some rounded and sub-rounded stones (2017) that was similar to 2003.

Sealing these features, and overlying layer 2003 was a black silt charcoal rich layer with stone and brick fragments throughout (2002). This layer was approximately 0.4m deep and was similar to layer 1002 in Trench 1. The remains of a brick structure were identified at the north-western end of the trench (F212). The cut for this structure was only visible in plan, as the fill was similar to layer 2002. A deposit of rubble, bricks and grey sand was identified infilling the structure.

Overlying layer 2002 was a deposit of grey stone and sand (2001) that represented a levelling layer for a layer of reinforced concrete (2000) that formed the present yard surface.

8.0 The Finds

Several fragments of Medieval pottery were recovered from features identified in Trench 1 during this evaluation. Green-glazed Deritend ware, including a slashed strap handle from a jug and part of a base were recovered from the fill of pit F100 (1005). A pulled rim from a green-glazed jug, and a fragment of cooking pot were also recovered. These suggest a date of 13th-14th century date for this context. The pottery recovered from the northern edge of this pit (F103, 1007) also comprised very abraded Deritend ware and cooking pot of a similar 13th-14th-century date.

The pottery recovered from the ditch (F105, 1010) that truncated the pit features also indicated a 13th-14th-century date, and comprised many sherds of different forms of Deritend ware including a strap handle, and cooking pot.

Medieval tile was also recovered from many contexts within this trench, though not in stratified Medieval deposits.

Fragments of willow pattern, and a fragment of late 19th-century Staffordshire yellow-glazed ware were recovered from the truncated pit F102 (1009), along with fragments of brick and Medieval tile. Willow pattern, and brick and floor tile were recovered from pit F101 (1006). Fragments of 19th-century course ware, Staffordshire yellow-glazed ware, glass/metal slag, crucible, and clay pipe were recovered from layer 1002. Unstratified artefacts recovered from Trench 1 included fragments of crucible, medieval tile, 19th-century course ware, a salt-glazed stoneware bottle base, fragments of glass/metal slag and a small clay pipe bowl with a spur and rouletted rim, possibly dating from the late 16th century.

One fragment of Deritend ware was recovered from Trench 2, from the fill of pit F207 (2012), though this is likely to be residual. A fragment of possibly early clay pipe was also recovered from this feature.

Glass slag, 19th-century clay pipe, Medieval and Post-medieval tile with mortar adhering, suggesting reuse, were recovered from pit F200 (2005).

No other artefacts were recovered from Trench 2.

9.0 The Environmental Evidence

Environmental samples were taken from the earliest features identified in Trench 1 (F100, 1005 and F103, 1007). These were assessed for environmental potential, and it was identified that they contained no waterlogged material. However, as neither the pit(s) nor the ditch were fully excavated during the course of the evaluation, it is possible that waterlogged remains are still to be identified at the base of these features.

10.0 Discussion

While not stratigraphically linked, it is likely that the two earliest features identified in Trench 1 (F100 and F103) represent two sides of the same pit, suggesting the pit itself was approximately 4.2m wide and exceeds 1.8m in depth. The date of the backfilling of this feature is undoubtedly Medieval, and it is most likely that the feature represents a clay pit perhaps associated with the local production of Deritend ware pottery. The pottery recovered from these features included abraded Deritend ware, though none of the fragments looked misfired suggesting they were not pottery wasters associated with a local kiln hypothesised in the area by the results of the excavations conducted at the back of the Old Crown public house in 1994 (Litherland 1994).

The ditch (F105) identified cutting the pit is also likely to be of Medieval date. At 3.3m wide and exceeding 1.8m in depth, it is substantially larger than the average plot boundary of this period. The ditch is, however, precisely in line with the plot

boundary of the Old Crown, and is therefore, despite its unusual size, likely to represent a boundary ditch. The plot width of the Old Crown itself is larger than the average plot of this period, and so a larger boundary ditch may not completely be out of context.

Despite Medieval tile being recovered from other contexts within Trench 1, all other features and deposits identified within this trench were dated to the Post-medieval period. The identification of slag and crucible remains is indicative of industrial activity in the area, and the depth of Post-medieval build-up and levelling layers within this area is important as it suggests that the survival of other Medieval features and deposits is likely to be high, and the truncation of earlier deposits by the modern building foundations and services is likely to be minimal.

While less substantial features and deposits were identified within Trench 2, the archaeology identified within this area is no less important. The grey cobbled layer 2003 is similar to deposits dating to the 17th century identified during the excavations at the back of the Old Crown in 1994. Therefore, despite the lack of dating evidence recovered from this layer during the present phase of archaeological work, it is likely that the small pits and post-holes identified as being sealed by this layer pre-date the 17th century. The presence of layer 2003 throughout the trench also suggests that the survival of pre-17th century deposits throughout the whole of the yard area is good.

As layer 2003 increased in depth towards Heath Mill Lane, it is likely that this layer represents a Post-medieval levelling deposit. The deposit identified sealing this layer (2002) was similar to 1002 identified in Trench 1 and is likely to represent a deposit associated with the 19th-century iron foundry in the vicinity.

The evaluation has demonstrated that the survival of Medieval and early Post-medieval features and deposits within the site is both good and extensive, and the importance of these features and deposits should not be underestimated. As the boundary ditch (F105) identified in Trench 1 is likely to be associated with the plot boundary of the Old Crown, it should be highlighted that the pit identified as being truncated by this ditch pre-dates the construction of the Old Crown in the late Medieval period. Therefore, the archaeological remains identified within this trench represent two distinct phases of Medieval activity which have the potential to shed light on changes in land use during this important period in Deritend's and Birmingham's history.

The potential survival of other significant remains has also been demonstrated during this phase of archaeological work. Pottery wasters identified during excavations at the Old Crown to the west in 1994 suggest there was a kiln in the local vicinity. While similar pottery was not identified during this phase of work, the identification of a large clay pit dating to this period, adds further weight to the likelyhood of local pottery production. It is possible that further evidence relating to the kiln survives elsewhere within the site boundaries.

11.0 Recommendations and Implications

As has been highlighted, important and significant remains dating to the Medieval period have been identified as surviving beneath the present garage building. It is also likely that further remains dating from this period, and from the early Post-medieval period survive as features and deposits elsewhere within the site boundaries, both inside and outside the present standing building.

Deposits of this date and nature have the potential to shed important light on previous domestic activity and industrial processes from the Medieval period onwards, and greatly contribute to our understanding of these periods in both a local and city-wide context. It is therefore highly likely that further archaeological work will be recommended by the City Council prior to any redevelopment of the area where these deposits are threatened by below ground construction work. All recommendations are preliminary and the final decision as to the extent and nature of this archaeological work rests with Dr. Michael Hodder, Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council.

12.0 Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by SPE ARchitecture on behalf of Taylor-Hart Limited. Thanks are due to Dr. Michael Hodder, Planning Archaeologist, who monitored the project on behalf of Birmingham City Council. Thanks are also due to Dr. James Grieg who assessed the potential for environmental remains, and Kirsty Nichol who spot dated the pottery, tile and clay pipe. The evaluation was supervised by Eleanor Ramsey with the assistance of Ioannis Altsitzoglou and Phillip Mann. Steve Litherland managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology and edited the report. The illustrations were prepared by Bryony Ryder and John Halsted.

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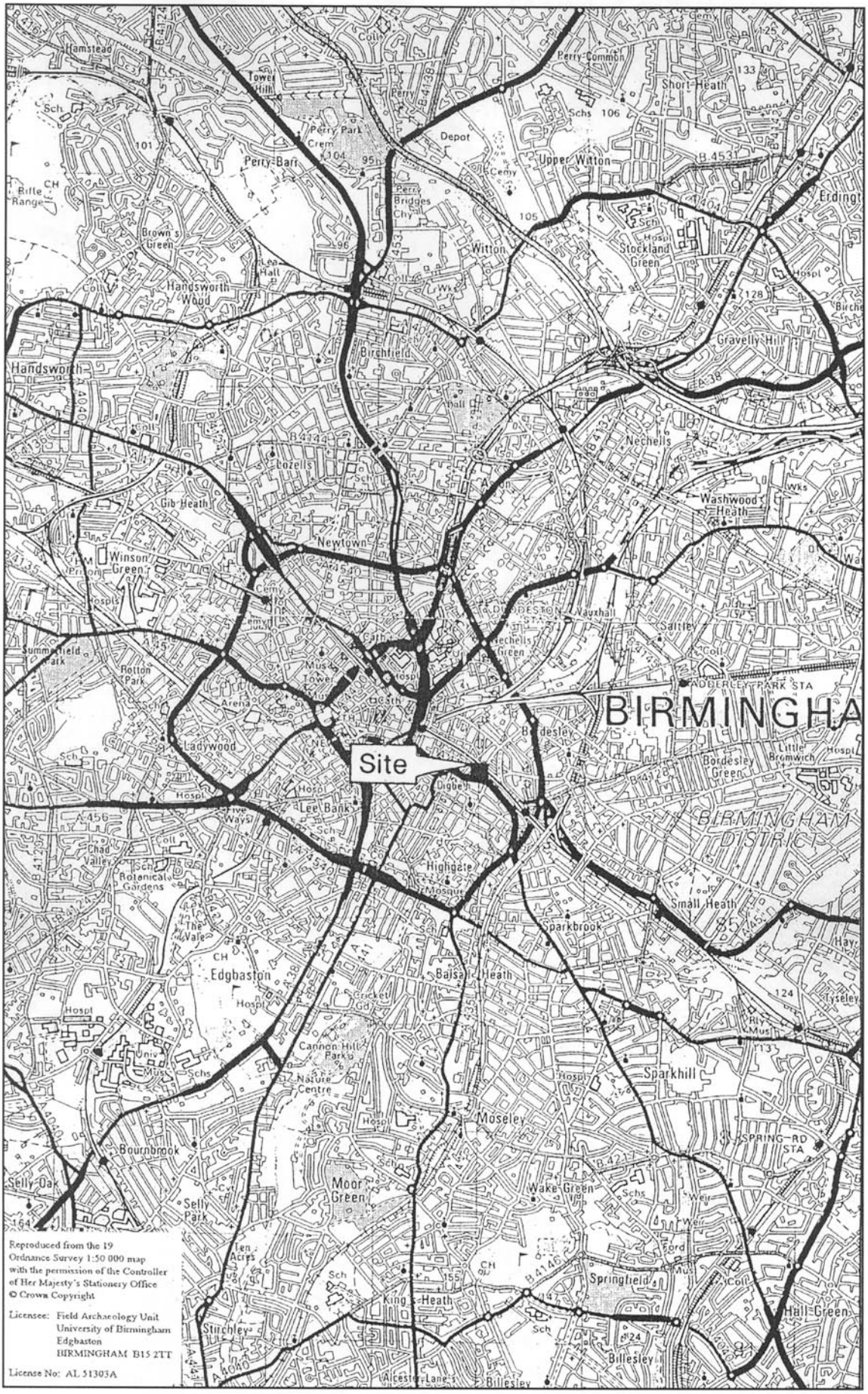
Site
BIRMINGHA
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Fig.1


1750
South View of St. Philip's
MOOR
PARK
Corn Market
CORN CHEAPING
DIGBETH
MOAT LANE
THE MOAT
DIGBETH
DIGBETH
Mill Yard
WATER STREET
RIVER
REA
St. John's Chappel
DERETEND
BORDESLEY
REA RIVER
ASTON
PARISH
TINS
ISH

Fig.2

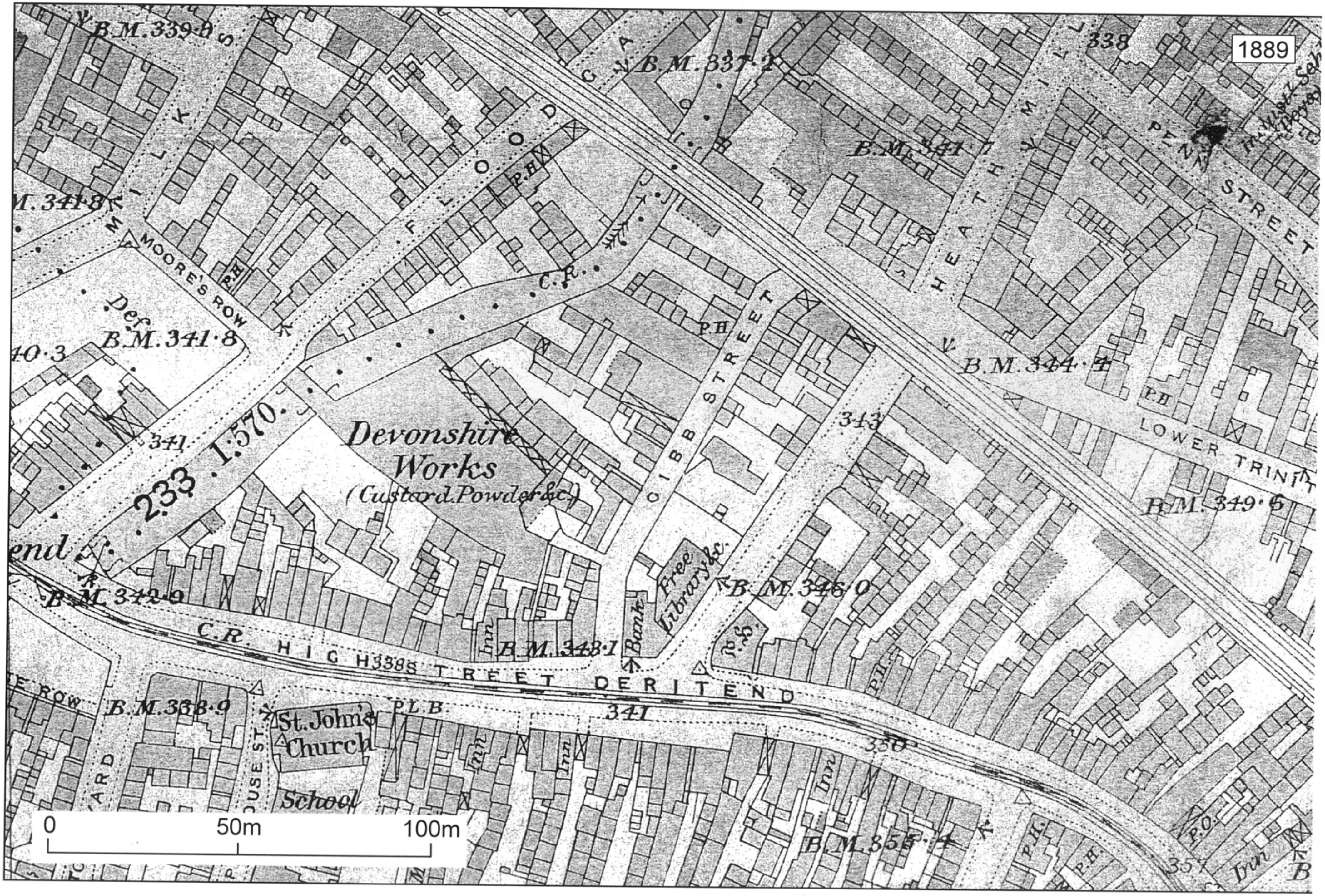
1889
B.M. 339·9
B.M. 337·2
338
B.M. 341·7
M. 341·8
MILK ST
FLOOD GATE
MOORE'S ROW
P.H.
Def.
B.M. 341·8
C.R.
HEATH MILL L
PENN STREET
GIBB STREET
B.M. 344·4
343
LOWER TRINITY
B.M. 349·6
Devonshire Works
(Custard Powder &c.)
341
233. 1:570.
Free Library &c.
B.M. 346·0
Bank
Inn
B.M. 343·1
B.M. 342·9
C.R. HIGH STREET DERITEND
B.M. 338·9
St. John's Church
School
P.L.B.
341
330
B.M. 355·4
P.O.
0
50m
100m

Fig.3

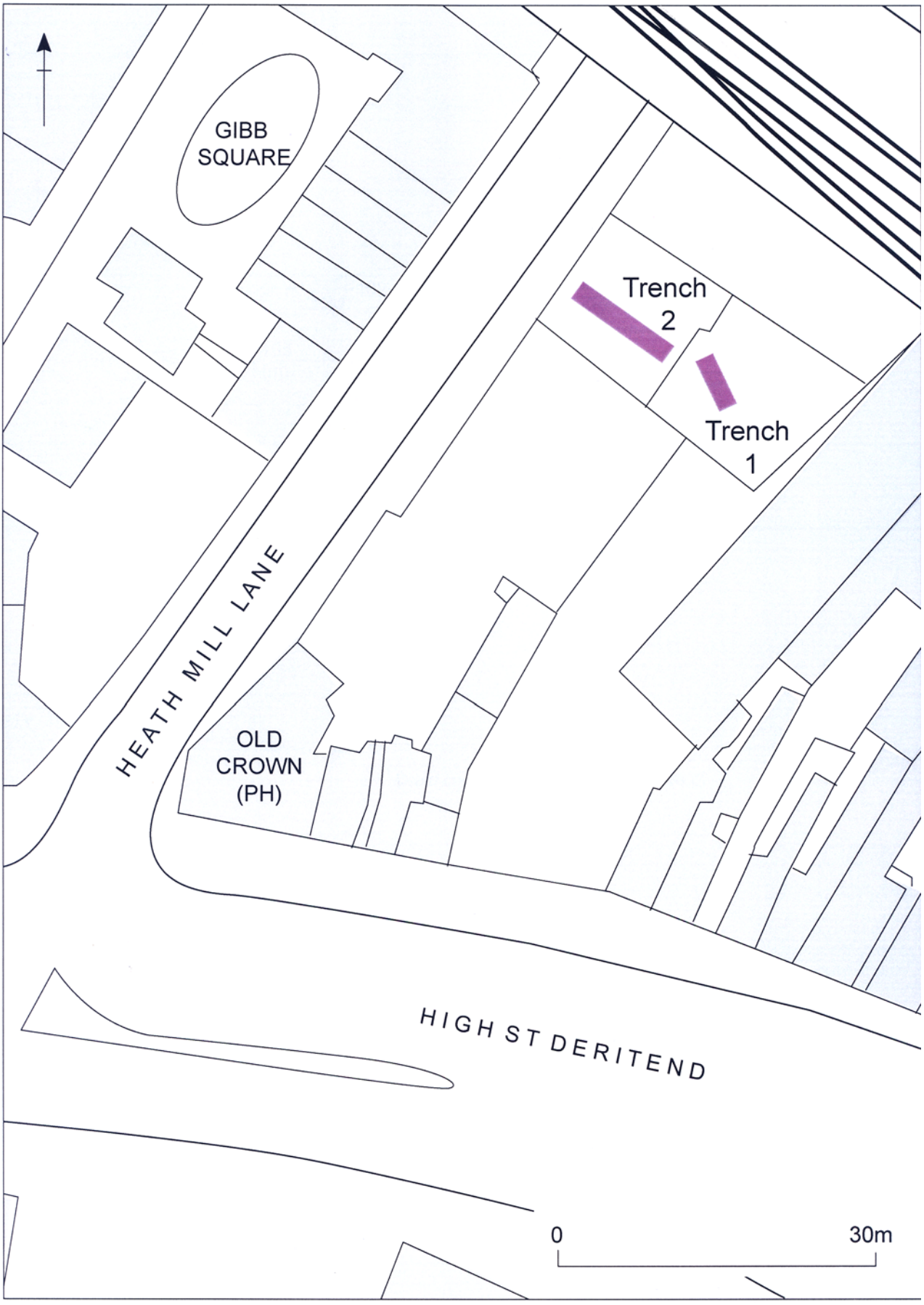
GIBB
SQUARE
Trench
2
Trench
1
HEATH MILL LANE
OLD
CROWN
(PH)
HIGH ST DERITEND
0
30m

Fig.4

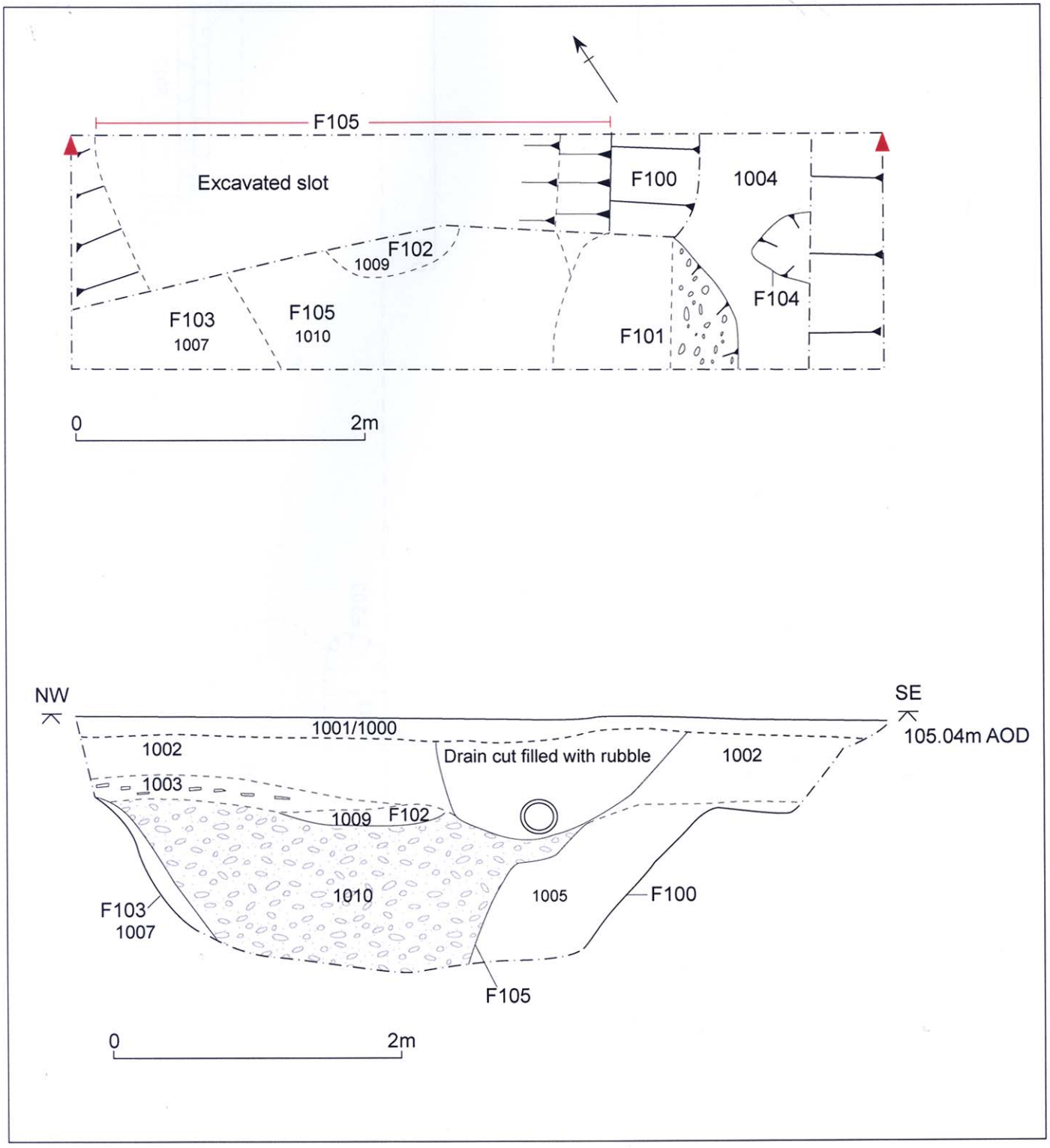
F105
Excavated slot
F100
1004
F102
1009
F103
1007
F105
1010
F101
F104
0
2m
NW
SE
1001/1000
1002
Drain cut filled with rubble
1002
105.04m AOD
1003
1009
F102
1010
1005
F100
F103
1007
F105
0
2m

Fig.5

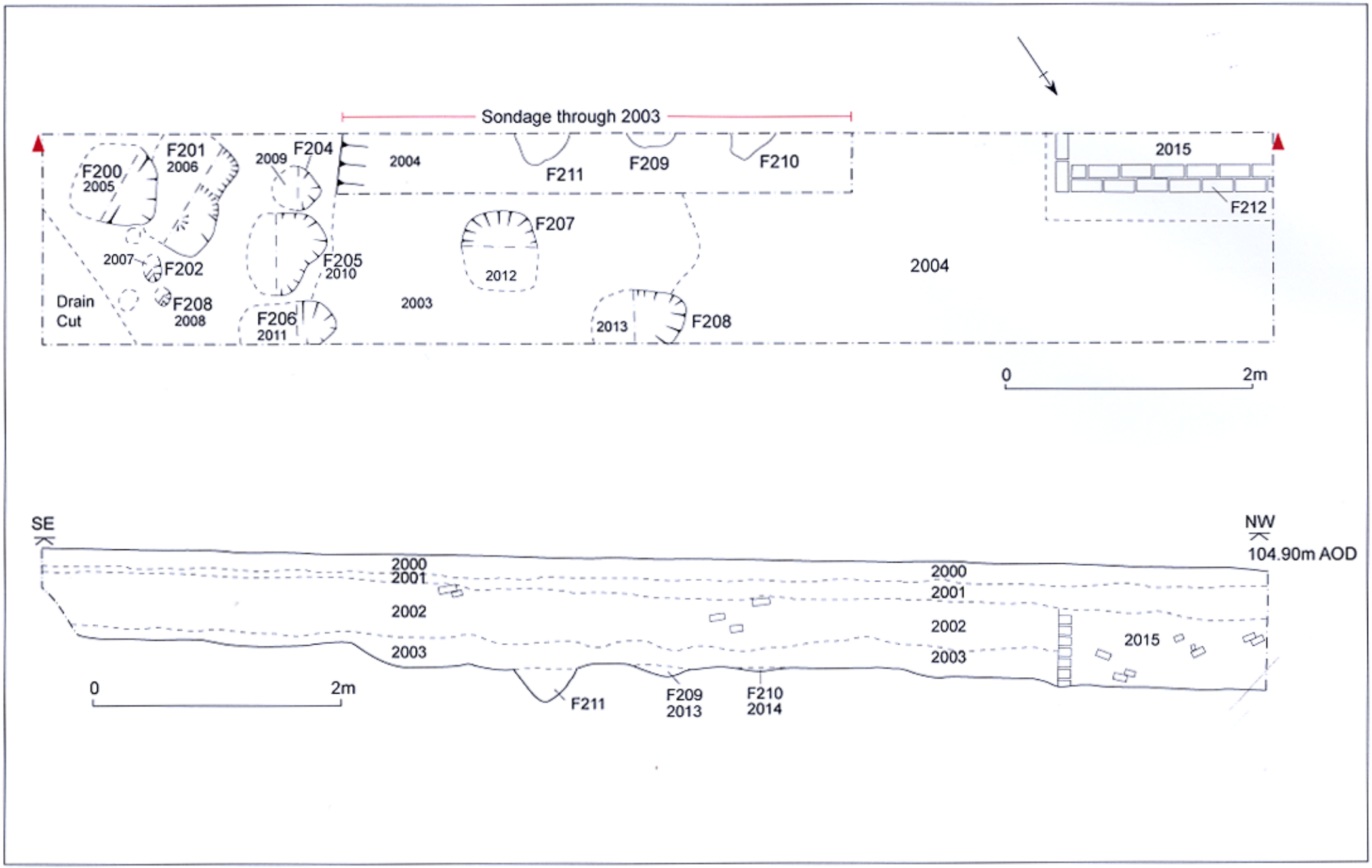
Sondage through 2003
F201
2006
F200
2005
2009
F204
2004
F211
F209
F210
2015
F212
F207
2012
2007
F202
F205
2010
2004
Drain
Cut
F208
2008
F206
2011
2003
2013
F208
0
2m
SE
NW
104.90m AOD
2000
2001
2002
2003
2000
2001
2002
2003
2015
0
2m
F211
F209
2013
F210
2014

Fig.6