

**An Archaeological  
Watching Brief  
at 62 Biggins Hall Crescent,  
Coventry, 2004**

**Project No. 1233**  
November 2004

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# **An archaeological watching brief at 62 Biggins Hall Crescent, Coventry**

John Halsted

## **Summary**

*In September 2004 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology on the site of a proposed house plot at 62 Biggin Hall Crescent, Coventry. The site lies in close proximity to a former medieval Benedictine Grange, the estate of which was still in existence until the nineteenth century. The site's potential for providing evidence of the cultivation of the estate through buried soil horizons has been highlighted. No buried soil horizons or cut archaeological features were observed during the excavation of the footings of the house.*

## **Introduction**

An archaeological watching brief at 62 Biggins Hall Crescent, Stoke, Coventry (Fig.1; NGR 435850/ 278740) was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology on the 8th and 9th of September 2004, following a brief prepared by Coventry City Council. The watching Brief was carried out during the excavation of footings for a house. The extent of the structure covered an area of c. 9m by 11m extending across the full width of the plot and adjacent to the road frontage.

## **Archaeological Background**

The village of Stoke originally comprised a number of hamlets which were associated with moated manor houses together with chapels and a parish church. The area was supported by a significant ceramics industry specialising in decorated floor tiles and later roof tiles and bricks. The site of Biggins Hall Crescent lies c.35m away from Biggin Hall moated manor, its associated fish ponds and estate. This was the site of a medieval Benedictine grange which was documented and partially rebuilt in the seventeenth century. The Manor and estate were extant and mapped in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The site at Biggins Hall Crescent lies in the first field adjacent to the medieval hall and may relate to a medieval or seventeenth century garden, orchard or hopyard. The potential for evidence relating to the cultivation of these gardens may, therefore be present within the site.

## **Methodology**

Footings for the house at Biggins Hall crescent were observed during machine excavation using a toothless bucket. A scale section drawing at 1:20 was produced together with measured sketch sections and a plan, and photographs taken using 35mm colour print film. Bulk palaeoenvironmental samples were taken from the subsoil.

## **Results**

The footings were excavated to a depth of 2m across the site (Plate 1), and a further trench (9m by 0.8m) to the rear of the house plot was excavated to a depth of c.0.7m, to locate existing drainage features (Fig.2a). A layer of stiff orange-red natural clay (1003) was observed in all excavated house footings at a depth of 0.7m below the current ground level (Fig.2b). A pale brown silty clay subsoil (1002) was recorded in all house footings

together with the trench excavated to the rear of the plot. This layer was c.0.4m in depth, with small sub-rounded stones c.20-40mm in length and occasional charcoal flecks (Fig.2b). Tree-root activity extended into this layer across the site, particularly at the western and eastern boundaries of the plot (Fig.2b, Plate 2). One fragment of post-medieval orange tile was recovered from this context. No archaeological features were observed cutting this layer. A layer of topsoil (1001) c 0.27m in depth was observed across the site overlying layer 1002. Fragments of late nineteenth/ early twentieth century bottle glass were recovered from this context.

Two 10 litre bulk samples were taken from 1002 for environmental processing. The recovery of a post-medieval tile fragment suggested, however, that this context is either of post-medieval origin, or contaminated with post-medieval material. This, together with the intrusion of tree-rooting, may undermine any palaeoenvironmental data obtained.

### **Conclusion**

The watching brief at Biggins Hall Crescent suggests that archaeological deposits relating to the Biggin Hall moated manor and grange have not been preserved at this site. The subsoil layer observed may relate to former cultivation, but has a low potential for palaeoenvironmental data and is likely to have been disturbed by subsequent post-medieval activity. The examination of samples from this context will not, therefore, provide a secure assessment of cultivation practices associated with the Biggins Hall Benedictine grange and later manor. No cut archaeological features or sealed archaeological contexts were recorded which may have provided such data. It can be suggested therefore that any archaeological contexts extending into this area have been subsequently disturbed, and that the site at Biggins Hall crescent has a very low potential for contributing to the understanding of the nearby Benedictine grange and manor.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Watching Brief was undertaken by John Halsted of Birmingham Archaeology, who also produced the report. The report was edited by the project manager, Richard Cuttler. Spot dates for the finds were provided by Erica Macey, Birmingham Archaeology.



Plate 1



Plate 2