

Low Hill, Wolverhampton

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF

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Fieldwork May 2007
Report February 2010

Low Hill, Wolverhampton

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

By
Emily Lancaster
Site Assistant

| | Name | Position |
|--|------------|------------------------------|
| Edited by/ Reviewed by: | S. Paul | Assistant Project Manager |
| Approved by: | A Jones | Director |
| | Signature: | |
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for
Keepmoat Homes
The Waterfront
Lakeside Boulevard
Doncaster
DN4 5PL

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Birmingham Archaeology
The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT
tel: +44 (0)121 414 5513, fax: +44 (0)121 414 5516, email: bham-arch@bham.ac.uk
www.barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau

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SUMMARY

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned in May and September 2007 by Wolverhampton City Council on behalf of Haslam Homes, to undertake an archaeological watching brief in respect of a proposed residential development at Low Hill, Wolverhampton. The report was commissioned by Keepmoat Homes in February 2010 in order to discharge the planning condition

The site was situated immediately northeast of a moated complex possibly dating back to the Saxon period, when Lady Godiva was known to have had an estate in the area (NGR SJ 9207 0098). A medieval farmstead, Showell Farm (Black Country Sites and Monuments Record no. 2535), is also nearby. Although these sites did not lie within the development area, associated buildings and possibly earlier archaeological deposits may have impinged upon the southwest corner of the development.

Three clay extraction pits and a series of house-outline foundation trenches were excavated under direct archaeological supervision. Several large blocks of stone were removed during the excavation of the foundation trenches, which may be associated with the farm buildings on the outside of the moat, as identified by the SMR. No other features were identified.

Low Hill, Wolverhampton

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1. Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Wolverhampton City Council on behalf of Haslam Homes to undertake an archaeological watching during the residential development at Low Hill, Wolverhampton (hereinafter referred to as the site).
- 1.1.2. This report outlines the results of the watching brief carried out in May and September 2007, and has been prepared in accordance the brief produced by Wolverhampton City Council (Appendix 1), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2007, Appendix 2) which was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to implementation in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990). The project conformed to the Institute for Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (IFA 2001

2. LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1.1. The site is located north of Fourth Avenue, Wolverhampton and is centred on NGR SJ92070098 (Fi g 1).
- 2.1.2. The character of the site at the time of the watching brief was as a construction site.

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1.1. The principal aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological features, structures, deposits, or horizons exposed during intrusive groundworks across the site.
- 3.1.2. More specific aims were to:
- Identify and record any remains likely to relate to medieval Showell estate and moat.
 - Identify and record any features which may relate to earlier activity in the area.
 - Increase our understanding of medieval Wolverhampton.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1.1. Anglo-Saxon Domesday states that Lady Godiva had an estate in Bushbury in the later Saxon period which may have been sited at Showell (Black Country Sites and Monuments Record number 2535). The moat was thought to have been a medieval homestead moat but its size and location may indicate the site of an earlier centre, possibly a Saxon Royal estate centre (ibid.).
- 4.1.2. Medieval The moat to the southwest of the development may be part of a medieval homestead or farm as identified on the Black Country SMR.
- 4.1.3. Post-medieval 19th century maps indicate a moat with farm buildings outside. Showell Farm and the moat were illustrated on a map of 1837 (parish map of

Bushbury), 1887 First Edition Ordnance Survey map of Staffordshire, and the Second and Third Edition (1902 and 1919 respectively) Ordnance Survey maps (Black Country Sites and Monuments Record number 2535).

5. METHODOLOGY

- 5.1.1. The watching brief covered an area of 0.75ha at the southwest corner of the construction site (edged in red on Fig. 1) and all foundation trenches and extraction pits within this area were monitored. A 360 tracked excavator with a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket was used to excavate the large clay extraction pits, with a narrow (c. 0.8m wide) toothless bucket used to excavate the foundation trenches (Fig. 1). This was monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist and complemented with the salvage recording of any archaeological deposits and features revealed during works.
- 5.1.2. The large clay extraction pit in Site B measured 11m in length by 2.5m wide and had a depth of approximately 3.8m through the natural subsoil. The two other pits were backfilled immediately after excavation. The foundation trenches for the houses were 0.8m wide and had a uniform depth of 1.4m through the natural clay. Only the foundations in the south-western corner were supervised during excavation.
- 5.1.3. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned at a scale of 1:50, and sections were drawn of all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:10. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on pro-forma cards. Written records and scale plans were supplemented by photographs using black and white monochrome, colour slide and digital photography.
- 5.1.4. Recovered finds were cleaned, marked and remedial conservation work undertaken as necessary. Treatment of all finds conformed to guidance contained within the Birmingham Archaeology Fieldwork Manual and First Aid for Finds (Watkinson and Neal 1998).
- 5.1.5. The full site archive includes all artefactual remains recovered from the site. The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage, 1991), the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage (UKIC, 1990) and Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections (Museum and Art Galleries Commission, 1992). The paper archive will be deposited with the Wolverhampton Archives service subject to permission from the landowner.

6. RESULTS

- 6.1.1. All context numbers appear in bold print in this section.
- 6.1.2. No archaeological features were identified in two of the three clay extraction pits, which were cut directly into the natural subsoil. The third pit cut into the natural subsoil, a red brown silty clay with large stones and flints (1000) throughout its matrix (Fig. 2) Overlying the natural subsoil was a yellow brown silt clay layer (1003) made up predominantly of industrial waste (brick fragments, coal). The remains of a red machine-made brick wall (1002), most likely related to the 20th century factory units which used to occupy the development area, were recorded in layer 1003. The area was sealed by a layer of dark grey/black silty clay (1001) with

industrial waste (slag, brick fragments, coal). This layer was probably made ground associated with the industrial units or their demolition.

- 6.1.3. The foundation trenches were dug to a uniform depth of 1.4m into the natural subsoil, mid brown, clean plastic clay (1008) in the south-western corner of the site, between Humphries Road and Fourth Avenue (Fig. 2, Plate 1). This was sealed by a layer of grey orange mottled sand clay (1007). Several large blocks of stone were removed from this layer during excavation which may relate to the farm buildings on the outer side of the moat (Plate 2). A dark grey/black sticky tarmac-like material (1006) overlay layer 1007. It may have been a levelling material or a ground stabilisation layer as the soil was very loose, causing sections in the trenches to collapse. Brown clay silt sand root disturbed topsoil (1005) sealed this area of the site.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1.1. The moat identified by the Black Country SMR was thought to have been part of a medieval homestead, however its size and location may indicate the site of an earlier centre. Domesday states that Lady Godiva had a moated estate in the later Saxon period which may have been sited at nearby Showell (Black Country Sites and Monuments Record number 2535). 19th century maps indicate a moat with farm buildings outside.
- 7.1.2. The large blocks of stone recovered during the watching brief may be associated with these buildings or earlier structures, although in the absence of an open area excavation to identify construction techniques such as postholes, beam slots or foundation cuts it is difficult to place the origins of these blocks.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Wolverhampton City Council, on behalf of Haslam Homes and the report was commissioned by Keepmoat Homes. Thanks are due to Phill Marshall and James Boulter for their co-operation and assistance throughout the project. Thanks also go to Mike Shaw who monitored the project on behalf of Wolverhampton County Council. Work on site was undertaken by Paul Breeze, Mary Duncan, Emily Hamilton and Michael Lobb. Emily Hamilton produced the written report which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds, and edited by Chris Hewitson who also monitored the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

9. REFERENCES

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CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

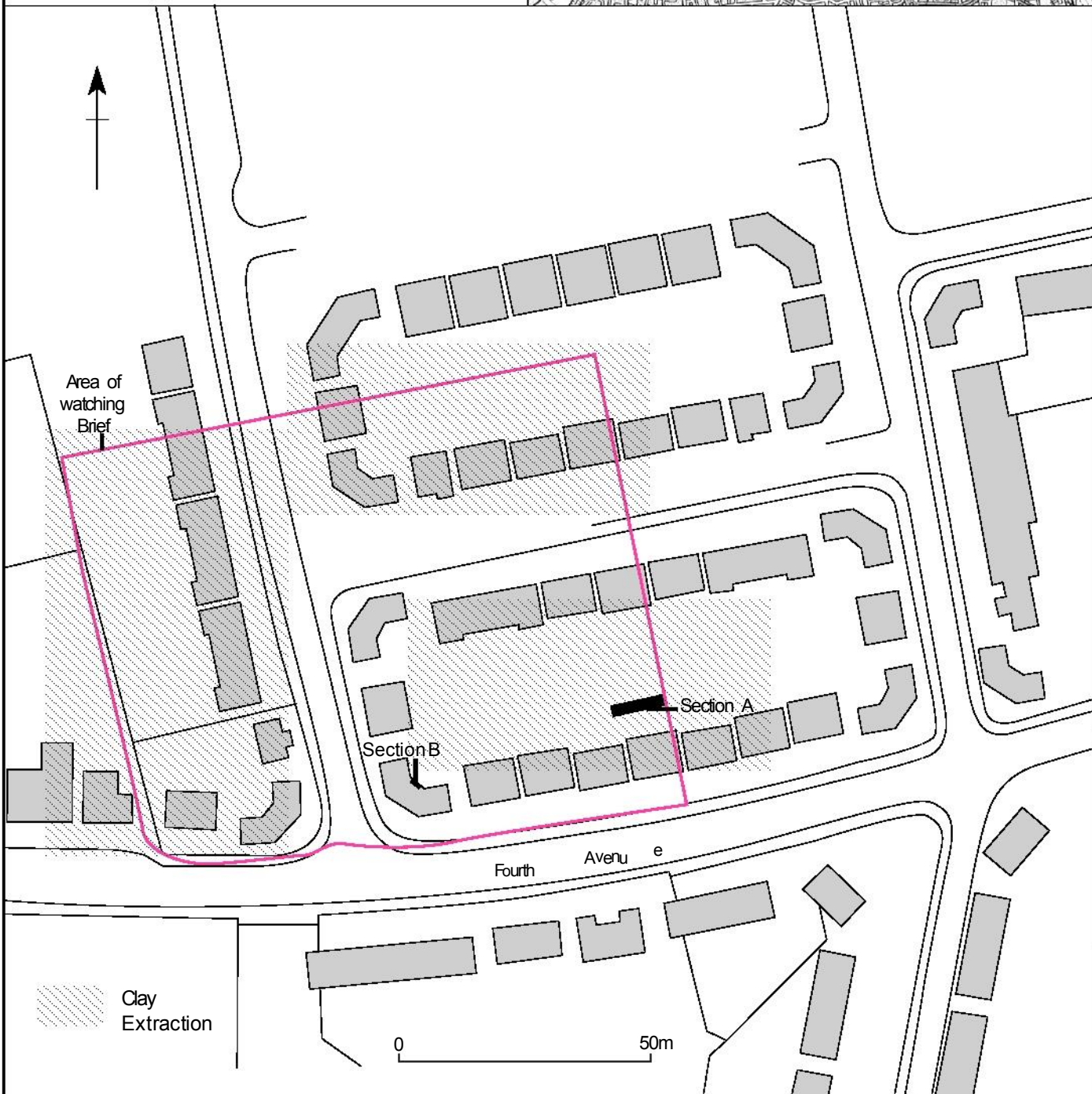
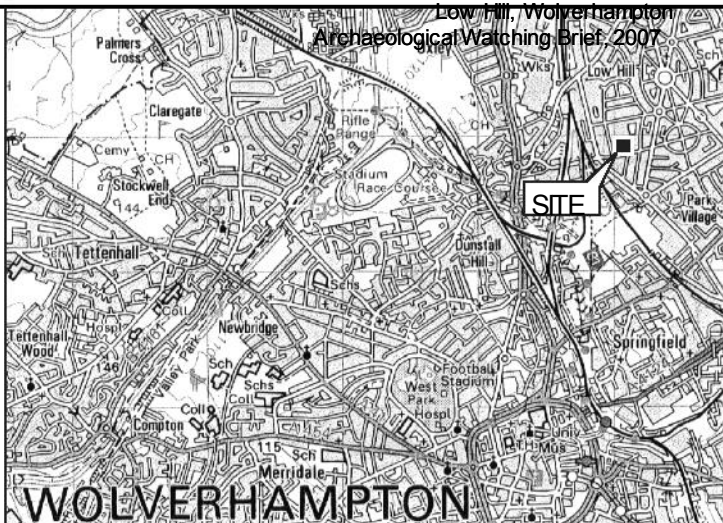
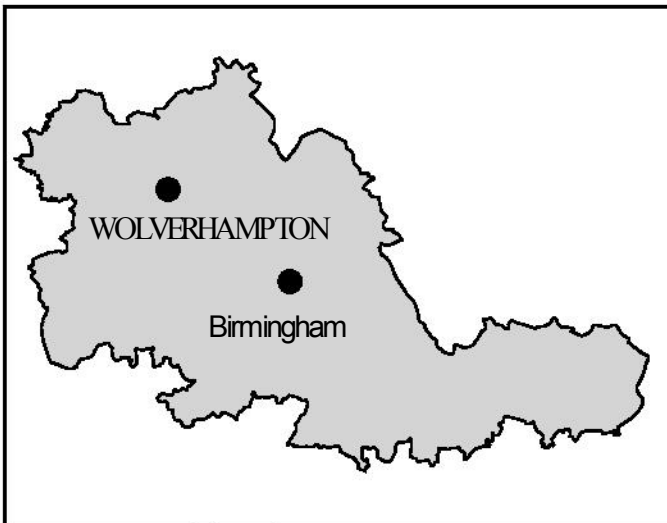
1837 Parish map of Bushbury

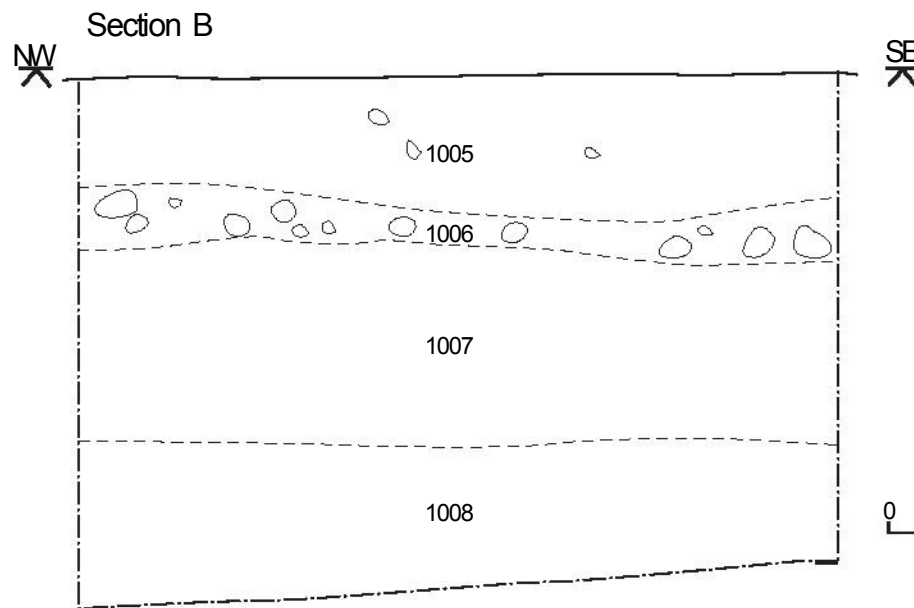
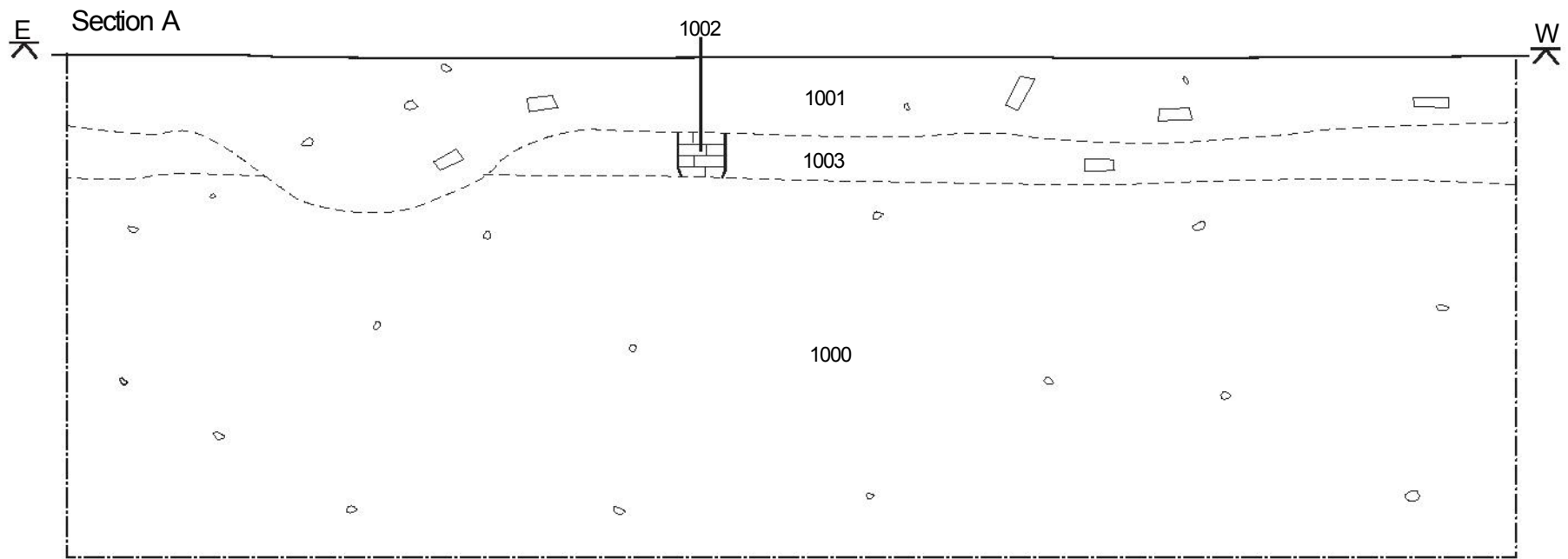
1887 First Edition Ordnance Survey map of Staffordshire

1902 Second Edition Ordnance Survey map

1919 Third Edition Ordnance Survey map

(all cited in the Black Country SMR report)





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