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Queen Square, Wolverhampton
Archaeological Watching Brief
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QUEEN SQUARE

Wolverhampton

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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**for
Wolverhampton City Council**

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QUEEN SQUARE, WOLVERHAMPTON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY ii

1. INTRODUCTION..... **1**

2. LOCATION AND GEOLOGY..... **1**

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES **1**

4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND **2**

5. METHODOLOGY..... **2**

6. RESULTS..... **3**

7. CONCLUSIONS..... **4**

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... **4**

9. REFERENCES..... **4**

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Site Location
- Figure 2: Site Plan
- Figure 3: 1750/1 Taylor’s Map
- Figure 4: 1840 Tithe Map
- Figure 5: 1889 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map
- Figure 6: 1919 3rd Edition Ordnance Survey Map

List of Plates

- Plate 1: Bedrock **1006**
- Plate 2: Glacial Sand and Clay **1008**, Black Silt-Sand **1007**
- Plate 3: Brick-built Footings **1009**
- Plate 4: Toilet Block **1003**

SUMMARY

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned in 2008 by Wolverhampton City Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief. The watching brief took place during selected parts of developer's groundworks throughout 2008 during the refurbishment of street furniture at Queen Square, Wolverhampton town centre (NGR SO 914986).

Wolverhampton is a settlement of some antiquity, with records dating back to AD 985. The site, prior to 1866, was known as High Green and is the location of the medieval market place one of the earliest established elements in the early development of the town. The earliest map evidence (dating to 1750/1) illustrates that the Town Hall and Charity School were located at the eastern end of the square. By the 1841/2 drafting of the Tithe Map, no structures are illustrated in High Green. After this the square was the location for several monuments including a statue of the Prince Consort, still present on the site, which was unveiled by Queen Victoria in 1866. At which time the street name was changed to Queen Square to commemorate the occasion. In the early 20th century tram lines were routed through the square and a public lavatory was located on the site.

It was hoped that the watching brief would identify and record any archaeological features located on the site, especially the Town Hall and/or the Charity School which are shown on the 1750/1 map.

Contractor's groundworks were occasionally monitored during 2008, specifically when the design of the redevelopment required excavation beyond the more superficial resurfacing works that characterised the majority of the development.

As a result of this work the natural bedrock was identified 1.2m below the modern ground surface, overlaid by glacial till deposits composed of silt and sand. This had been cut by brick-built structures and foundations. This included substantial footings constructed of bricks characteristic of a mid-to late-18th century to early 19th century date. This structure appeared to follow the line of Lichfield Street and Dudley Street. It does not exactly match the location of the Charity School, and the construction materials are a little late in date to be readily identifiable as this structure. It could however be the remains of a later addition to the Charity School, or a rebuild on the same site, subsequently demolished prior to the surveying of the Tithe Map in 1841/2.

Further structures identified included the original location of the statue of the Prince Consort and the remains of the underground public toilets, dating to around the turn of the 20th century, both illustrated on historic maps of the time.

QUEEN SQUARE, WOLVERHAMPTON

Archaeological Watching Brief, 2008

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1. Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Wolverhampton City Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during construction work associated with the refurbishing of Queen Square Wolverhampton (Figure 1).
- 1.1.2. This report outlines the results of the watching brief carried out during 2008, and has been prepared 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 at Queen Square Wolverhampton City Centre, and is centred on NGR SO 914 986 (Figure 1).
- 2.1.2. Wolverhampton is located on a spur of the Birmingham sandstone plateau (Adams and Colls 2007, 1) the site is located towards the higher part of the plateau with the current topography sloping downwards towards the south. The overlying drift deposits consist of glacial sand and clay (*ibid*).
- 2.1.3. The present character of the site is an area of open ground with pavement for pedestrian use. Queen Square is at the centre of Wolverhampton, at the convergence of several roads leading into the town centre. These include Lichfield Street, Dudley Street and Lich Gate at the eastern end of the square and North Street, Victoria Street and Darlington Street at the west end of the square. The square itself, is square in name only, and travels in a narrow strip aligned east-west along the side of the road, now a major bus route, and is approximately 100m long and 20m wide. The majority of the square, not including the road was refurbished in the course of the development. The watching brief itself was confined to the western end of the square, where groundworks for the installation of a water feature and associated ornamental structures required relatively intrusive ground work (Figure 2).

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1.1. The principal objective 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:
- To locate and record any remnant of the Town Hall, or Charity School illustrated on the site in 1750

4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1.1. The earliest mention of Wolverhampton is in AD985 when Wulfruna, a Mercian noblewoman, is granted land at 'Hampton' by king Ethelred. Part of this land she in turn granted in AD994 to the church at Wolverhampton. This has often been taken as the date of the 'foundation' of Wolverhampton, or at least of its church. The wording of the charter, however, appears to suggest that the grant is to an existing church, which had recently been re-founded. There is indeed a tradition that a church was founded at Wolverhampton by Wulfhere, king of Mercia, as early as AD659. This would perhaps indicate that Wolverhampton began life as a royal estate centre with an attached minster church (pers comm. Mike Shaw).
- 4.1.2. Prior to the 19th century the site was known as High Green, and was the location of the medieval market place, historically an important element at the hub of Wolverhampton (Upton 1998 12). The market received a charter in 1258 and the market place may date from this time, although an informal market, possibly held in the churchyard, is known to have been in existence by 1180 (pers comm. Mike Shaw).
- 4.1.3. The earliest map of the town dating to 1750/1 (Figure 3) shows that at this time two buildings were located at the east end of High Green. These were the Town Hall, built by 1703 and the Charity School, built by 1719-20 (Mander 1960, 117, 135-7). These buildings rapidly fell into disrepair, however, and the Town Improvement Act of 1777 gave the Commissioners powers to clear the area. (*ibid*, 135). The area is shown as cleared on Godson's Map of 1788.
- 4.1.4. The installation of a gas supply to Wolverhampton in 1820 resulted in the 'erection of a monstrous pillar surmounted by a lantern' (*ibid*, 154) located at the site of the market cross. Based on the 1835 illustration, this was towards the eastern end of the square (*ibid.*). It is presumably the structure described as 'The Column' marked on Wallis's map of 1827. Apparently this was not a popular monument, and was demolished sometime soon after (*ibid.*). It is not shown on the Tithe Map of 1841-2 when the site is shown as cleared once again (Fig 4), and by 1860 a photograph illustrates a Russian cannon on the same spot (Farley 1985, 9).
- 4.1.5. By 1866 Queen Victoria had visited the town and unveiled a statue of the Prince Consort (Upton 1998, 77), still standing today on the site. This resulted in the renaming of the site from High Green to Queen Square in honour of the occasion.
- 4.1.6. By 1889 the first edition Ordnance Survey map shows the location of the Prince Consort statue, at the eastern end of the square, and also illustrates the addition of a tram line through the square (Figure 5). The 1902 Ordnance Survey map illustrates a small structure to the east of the statue. A photograph taken around the same time (c 1900) indicates that this was a small octagonal building (Clare 2005, 18), possibly associated with the tram line. This photograph also illustrates the entrance to the public toilets shown on the 1919 Ordnance Survey map (Figure 6).

5. METHODOLOGY

- 5.1.1. The majority of the proposed construction had a minimal impact on any stratigraphy present on the site comprising re-surfacing. As a result only the more intrusive groundworks were monitored during construction. This comprised

of the excavation of a series of geotechnical test pits at the eastern end of the square, a trench for the installation of a water tank for an ornamental fountain and foundation trenches for associated street furniture (Figure 2). This was carried out by the contractor on site with mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. 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. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned and sections drawn of all features and significant vertical stratigraphy. 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.
- 5.1.3. 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 appropriate repository subject to permission from the landowner. No finds were recovered during the course of the work.

6. RESULTS

- 6.1.1. The areas that were monitored for archaeological features are illustrated in Fig. 2. The results of the watching brief are described together below.
- 6.1.2. The bedrock (**1006**) was encountered 1.2m below the modern ground surface, during the excavations for the installation of the water tank (Plate 1). This consisted of pink sandstone. This was overlaid by pink mixed sandy clay (**1008**), the result of glacial activity. This was encountered over the area of the site, ranging between 0.55m and 0.8m below the modern ground surface (Plate 2).
- 6.1.3. Cut through this horizon to the north of the site was a small section of quite substantial brick built footings (**1009** Plate 3). Aligned with the frontage of Lichfield Street, these were 0.5m wide and were survived to a height of 0.6m (located 1.3m below the modern ground surface), although it was apparent that this was not the full extent. The hand-made red bricks measuring 2¾ inches by 9¾ inches by 4½ inches. These were set in a hard lime mortar. No sign of the associated floor surface was evident.
- 6.1.4. Overlying these and much of the eastern side of the site was a layer (**1007**) of black silt and sand with coal and clinker type material throughout up to 0.3m deep (Plate 2).
- 6.1.5. In the area of the water tank, brick-built structure **1003** was the remnants of the old underground public toilet block, identified during excavation by the ceramic tile lined walls (Plate 4). This structure is clearly illustrated on the 1919 Ordnance Survey map (Figure 6). This structure had been back filled with loose brick rubble (**1004**). Possibly associated with this at the northern extent of the area of the tank were the remnants of a plinth for an earlier statue (**1005**).

- 6.1.6. Other brickwork included signs of a brick-built surface predating the existing pavement, and a small area of ground surface constructed with granite sets was identified towards the north of the site.
- 6.1.7. These features and the area of the site was overlaid by up to 0.3m of concrete (**1001**), capped with the modern tarmac and brick ground surface (**1000**).

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1.1. Part of the line of wall/ structure **1009** follows the line of Dudley Street and Lichfield Street. This may relate to an earlier structure aligned along these streets. However it does not correspond with the Charity School depicted on the 1750/1 map and no evidence to the Charity School was found during monitoring of ground work.
- 7.1.2. Although this area of Wolverhampton was presumably within the Medieval core no trace of archaeological deposits relating to this were encountered during the course of this work. The majority of the activity encountered during this work consisted of the remnants of brick-built foundation walls. Including **1009**, the size of the bricks (2¾ inches) was reminiscent of mid to late-18th century to early 19th century construction. These may suggest structures were constructed and subsequently demolished on this alignment during the period between the 1750/1 map and the tithe map (1841/2), possibly as part of later remodelling of the Charity School. As there was no sign of an associated ground surface with these footings it seems probable that during the 19th century the original ground surface was graded down during the refurbishment of the square.
- 7.1.3. Other brick built features identified during the course of the watching brief can be easily identified with structures illustrated on the early Ordnance Survey Maps. This includes the brick built-structure **1005** identified with the 'Prince Consort Statue' illustrated on the 1889 map (Figure 5). Also structure **1003** with the distinctive white tiled wall treatment can be identified as the 'Latrines' illustrated on the 1919 map (Figure 6).

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1.1. The project was commissioned by Wolverhampton City Council. Thanks are due to Jamie Carden of Edmund Nuttal 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. The assessment was undertaken by Liz Bishop, Mary Duncan, Emily Hamilton and Sam Hepburn. Mary Duncan produced the written report which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds, and edited by Chris Hewitson who also monitored the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

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List of Maps

1750/1	Taylor's Map
1788	Godsons' Map
1827	Wallis Map
1841/2	Tithe Map
1889	1 st Edition Ordnance Survey Map Sheet No. 62.6 Scale 1:2500
1900	2 nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map Sheet No. 62.6 Scale 1:2500
1919	3 rd Edition Ordnance Survey Map Sheet No. 62.6 Scale 1:2500











