

birmingham archaeology



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital, Vincent Drive
Phase 2 Archaeological Excavations
2008



Project No. 1804

Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital,
Vincent Drive, Birmingham:
Phase 2 Archaeological Excavations
2008

by
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**QUEEN ELIZABETH PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL, VINCENT DRIVE, BIRMINGHAM:
PHASE 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS 2008**

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SUMMARY

A planning condition was placed on land at the Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital, Vincent Drive, Birmingham prior to the incorporation of this land into the Birmingham Joint Venture New Hospital development. As a consequence Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Trust to undertake some archaeological observation and recording on a small area of land located between the buildings of the psychiatric hospital, at present standing on the site, and Vincent Drive. This represented the final part of the development area with archaeological potential that had not already been excavated and recorded.

Although live electric services and protected tree limited the area of excavation an area 2.5m by 1.6m in plan was excavated to a depth of 2.2m below the modern ground surface. This was to the top of the natural subsoil. Cutting this was a pit circular in plan, about 1.2m in diameter with charcoal visible at the northern edge. Due to the depth of stratigraphy this could not be safely inspected in any detail. Above this was a layer 0.5m deep of probable hill wash. Above this was an accumulation of around 1.5m of varying layers of silt and clay with late-20th century material throughout, presumably related to the construction of the Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital in 1988.

VINCENT DRIVE, BIRMINGHAM: ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

1 INTRODUCTION

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Trust to undertake some archaeological observation and recording ahead of a proposed development at Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital, Vincent Drive, Edgbaston, Birmingham (here after referred to as the site, Planning Application Number S/04585/03/OUT and S/04620/07/RES).

This report outlines the results of this archaeological work, carried out in May 2008. This phase of archaeological field investigations is the culmination of evaluation work carried out on this site in February 2008 (Charles 2008). This area of excavation was located in the only remaining area of archaeological potential that could be practically excavated within the development area. This report has been prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations (IFA 2001).

The excavation conformed to a brief produced by Birmingham City Council (2008, Appendix 1), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2008, 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).

2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY, AND GEOLOGY

The site is located between the buildings of the Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital to the north and Vincent Drive to the south and at the time of excavation consisted of an area of landscaped grass on the corner of the access road to the psychiatric hospital car park. The actual area excavated was substantially constrained by a high voltage electric cable to the north of the excavation and a protected tree to the southwest of the excavation. The area of the site was further constrained by the presence of two further underground electric services identified to the northeast and southwest of the area.

The site lies at around 138.8m AOD. It is located towards the base of a small natural valley. It had been modified in recent years with the development of the hospital resulting in subsequent infilling and levelling of the land. This valley probably facilitated the drainage of natural springs downwards in a south-easterly direction towards the Bournbrook (Jones 1988 1), now located to the south of the site.

The solid geology consists of Wildmoor Sandstone formation overlaid by glacial till (Charles 2008). It is hoped that alluvial deposits, related to any palaeo-channel that once flowed through the valley could be encountered during the course of the excavation, with the hope that these deposits could contain artefacts that could inform on past environmental conditions (Birmingham City Council 2008).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The earlier redevelopment of the site during the construction of the Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital in the late-1980s resulted in archaeological recording on the site in 1988 and 1989. This consisted of trenches, sondages and observations in advance of and during ground works associated with the construction of the existing building. Three burnt mounds of probable Bronze Age date and associated features were located, alongside a north–south stream channel (Jones 1989). Burnt mounds as an archaeological feature consist of heat-shattered pebbles and charcoal in a mound 10–20m in diameter. They are normally found adjacent to streams and often survive as a

layer of heat-shattered stones or charcoal in or adjacent to the stream bed. They survived as monuments from 2000–800BC and have been suggested to have been used for cooking food, saunas or small scale-industrial processes such as felting cloth, leatherworking or woodworking (Hodder 2004, 28). The archaeological recording predated the constraint imposed by Planning Policy Guidance 16 (DoE 1991) and as such did not allow the detailed excavation and recording of the remains of the burnt mounds and palaeochannels.

The site lies to the south-west of the known remains of Metchley Roman fort and associated *vicus* which were occupied between AD48 and AD200. The fort was investigated extensively in the 1960s (Jones 2002) and has been the centre of several programmes of developer funded archaeological excavation and recording since 1997 (Jones 2005, Jones forthcoming a and b). These have resulted in a greater understanding of the fort and revealed further evidence for the *vicus* a nucleated military-related settlement consisting of scattered timber building based around a road leading out of the fort's west gate.

A desk-based archaeological assessment of the whole of the University area in 1999 identified a medium level of archaeological survival in the area between QEPH and Vincent Drive (See Fig. 3, Jones 1999). An evaluation phase on land immediately to the west of this area of excavation illustrated that although no archaeological deposits were present in the vicinity, the ground surface did not appear to have been reduced during the development of the hospital indicating the possibility that archaeological deposits especially those relating to the burnt mounds identified during the earlier construction of the site could survive in pockets beyond the 1980s construction footprint. This work sought to identify any undisturbed and unrecorded deposits surviving on the site.

4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of the archaeological work was to clean and record any buried remains.

More specific aims were, as stated in the written scheme of investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2008 2-3), to:

- Define potential surviving monuments, including the burnt mounds.
- Define the potential of palaeoenvironmental deposits in the former stream line.

The objective of the work was to place the results within the background of similar prehistoric activity in Birmingham, as well as investigate the sites relationship with the Roman fort and *vicus* of Metchley.

5 METHOD

All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a JCB mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the subsoil.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present, at a scale of 1:20. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on *pro-forma* context and feature cards. Written records and scale plans were supplemented by photographs using digital, monochrome, and colour slide photography.

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 (Walker 1990) and Standards

in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections (Museum and Art Galleries Commission 1992).

6 RESULTS

The area of excavation was severely restricted due to the presence of live service cables at all the extents of the excavation. Within the excavated area a large piece of concrete was encountered at the southeastern end of the area. This remained *in situ* and further reduced the area of excavation to an area roughly 2.5m by 1.6m in plan. This was excavated to a depth of 2.2m below the current ground surface (136.67m AOD). Due to this depth of overburden the trench could not be entered due to health and safety constraints.

The earliest deposit, the natural subsoil (3008) consisted of compact red clay. It seemed that cut into this horizon was a possible pit. This appeared to be circular in plan, about 1.2m in diameter, with a silt rich fill with charcoal concentrated to the northern edge. This was sealed by a layer of compact orange silt and sand which had occasional silt rich lenses (3004) and a depth of 0.5m. This was possibly the result of colluvial deposition although it is equally possible that this is a very well compacted recent levelling layer.

Above this was a layer (3003) of compact grey clay and silt 0.7m deep. Although this had few inclusions occasional objects noted during machining including construction materials indicated that this was deposited in the late 20th century. Either cut into this, or an inclusion within the context was a large piece of concrete (3006 not illustrated), square in plan approximately 1.8m wide, as the extent of this lay beyond the extent of the excavation it was left *in situ* in case of disturbing the surrounding services. Sealing this and the associated layer 3003 was a layer of red sand and silt (3002) 0.4m deep followed by a successive layer of grey silt and clay (3001) 0.4m deep. Again although there were few artefacts throughout these layers, those noted, for example plastic, drinks cans, occasional tile and brick indicate a very late-20th century date. The area of the trench was sealed by a layer of topsoil (3000) 0.2m deep, capped by grass. No artefactual or ecofactual items were recovered during this work.

7 DISCUSSION

The work carried out on the site prior and during the construction of the Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital overlap with this area of excavation (Fig 4). The excavation area is almost in the same location as a burnt mound recorded in section during ground works in 1989 (Jones 1989). This could suggest that the pit located at the base of this excavation (3005) could be related to this monument, or the associated features noted, but not excavated, at the time. The extent of the impact of construction in 1989 is unclear although the report does state that the area was reduced by up to 2m (Jones 1989, 4). If the lower layer recorded in the trench (3004) is naturally deposited it would indicate that not all of the development area was reduced to this extent.

The overlying layers can be directly associated with the construction of the hospital buildings presumably the natural slope of the ground was terraced, to the north of the site, and the soil from this deposited in the vicinity of the area of excavation, at the lower lying ground levels in order to make a level platform for construction. Certainly the upper layers of mixed clay and gravel, and the topsoil are visually very similar to the deposits recorded in the evaluation (see Charles 2008 Plate 1 and 2).

The combination of the two evaluation trenches (Charles 2008) and the present excavation combined with the results of previous archaeological work (Jones 1988) would appear to suggest that a narrow valley formerly ran approximately north—south across the site. The majority of the deposits associated with the valley including burnt mounds

and trackways identified in 1988 have been subsequently removed by the construction of the Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital and the reduction of the natural hill slope to the north and northeast of the site. However, along the southern side of the site the land had been built-up above the natural land level and over the former stream channel.

8 IMPLICATIONS

No significant archaeological remains were revealed in the evaluation trenches from the earlier phase of archaeological work (Charles 2008). The remains of a pit (3004) possibly correlated with the location of a burnt mound in the current excavation. However, its depth at 2.2m below the current ground level would suggest that development work would be unlikely to impact on its survival.

The current programme of archaeological investigations focused on all of the accessible areas that ran along the southern side of the site. Further evaluation directly to the north had been prevented by the presence of live 11kV electricity supply and the presence of the current Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital. It is not envisaged that further archaeological work will be practical or yield substantial results given the extensive scale of development and ground reduction undertaken in the late-1980s. As such the current archaeological investigations have maximised the results given the limited area for potential excavation.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavation was commissioned by Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Trust. Thanks are due to Alex McDonald, Senior Consultant of EC Harris Consultants, for his assistance with the project. Thanks are also due to Dr. Mike Hodder for monitoring the project and giving on-site guidance. The project was supervised by Mary Duncan, assisted by Emma Sautejeau. The illustrations were prepared by Helen Moulden and the text was edited by, who managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

10 REFERENCES

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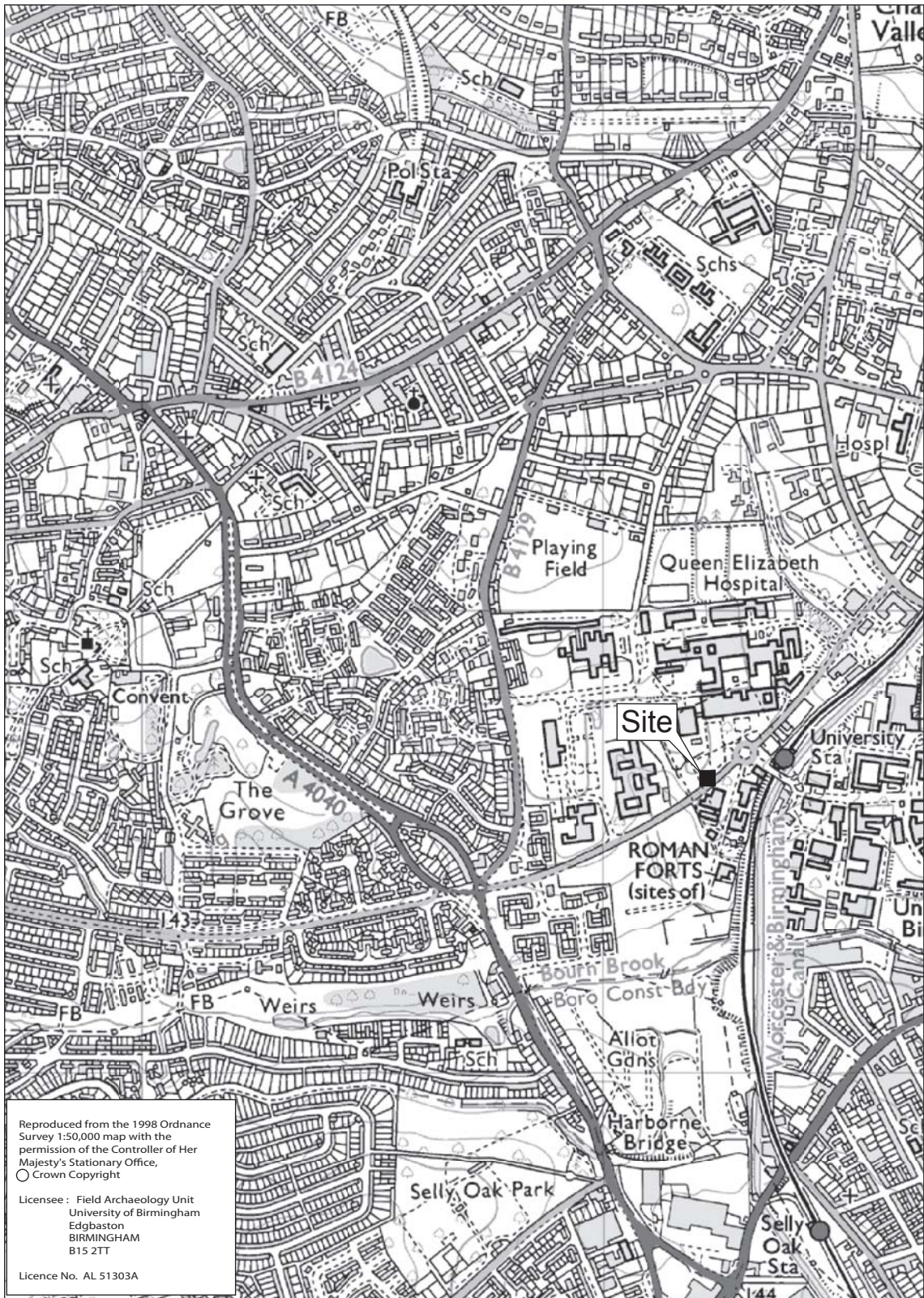


Fig.1

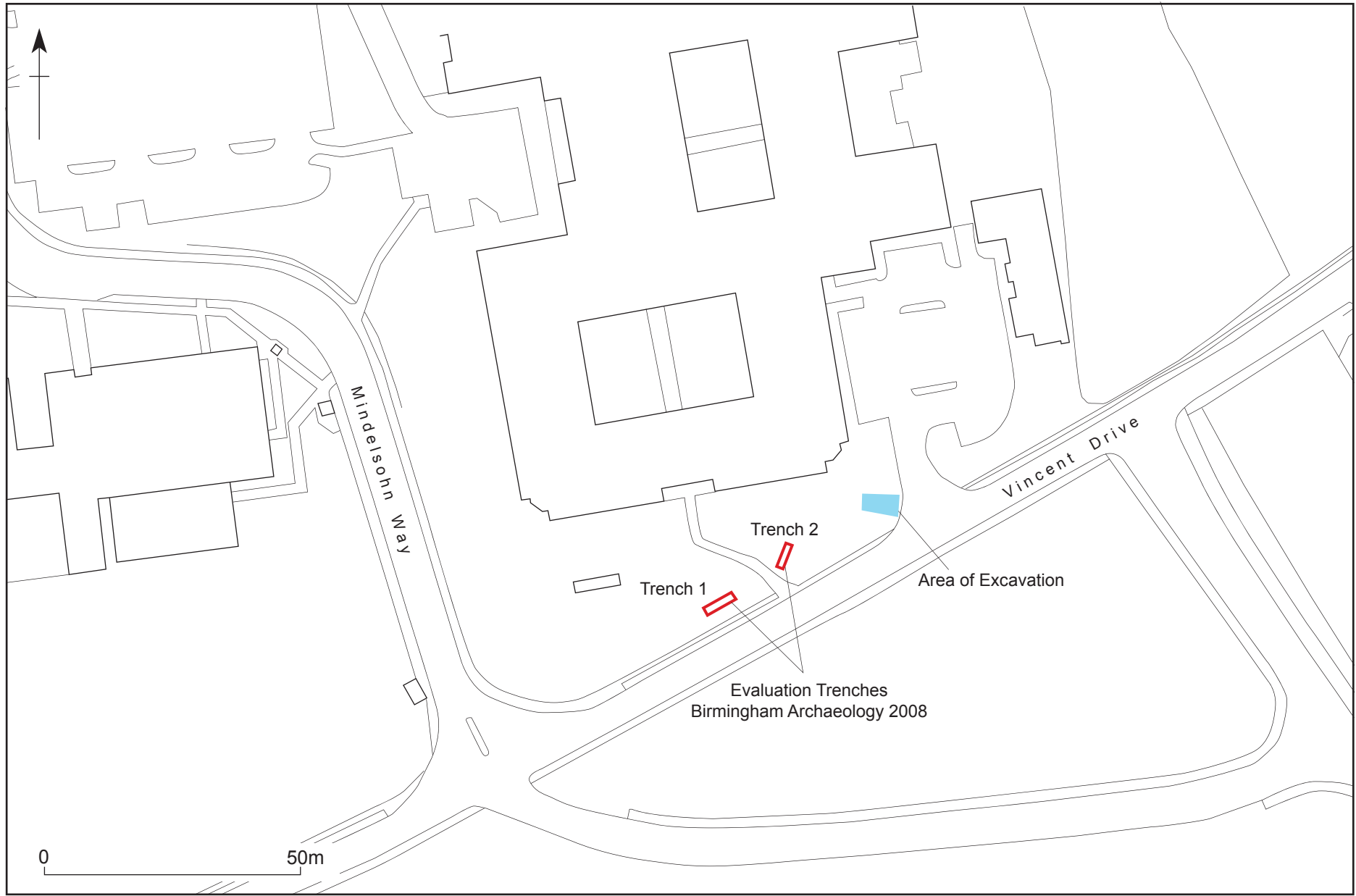


Fig.2

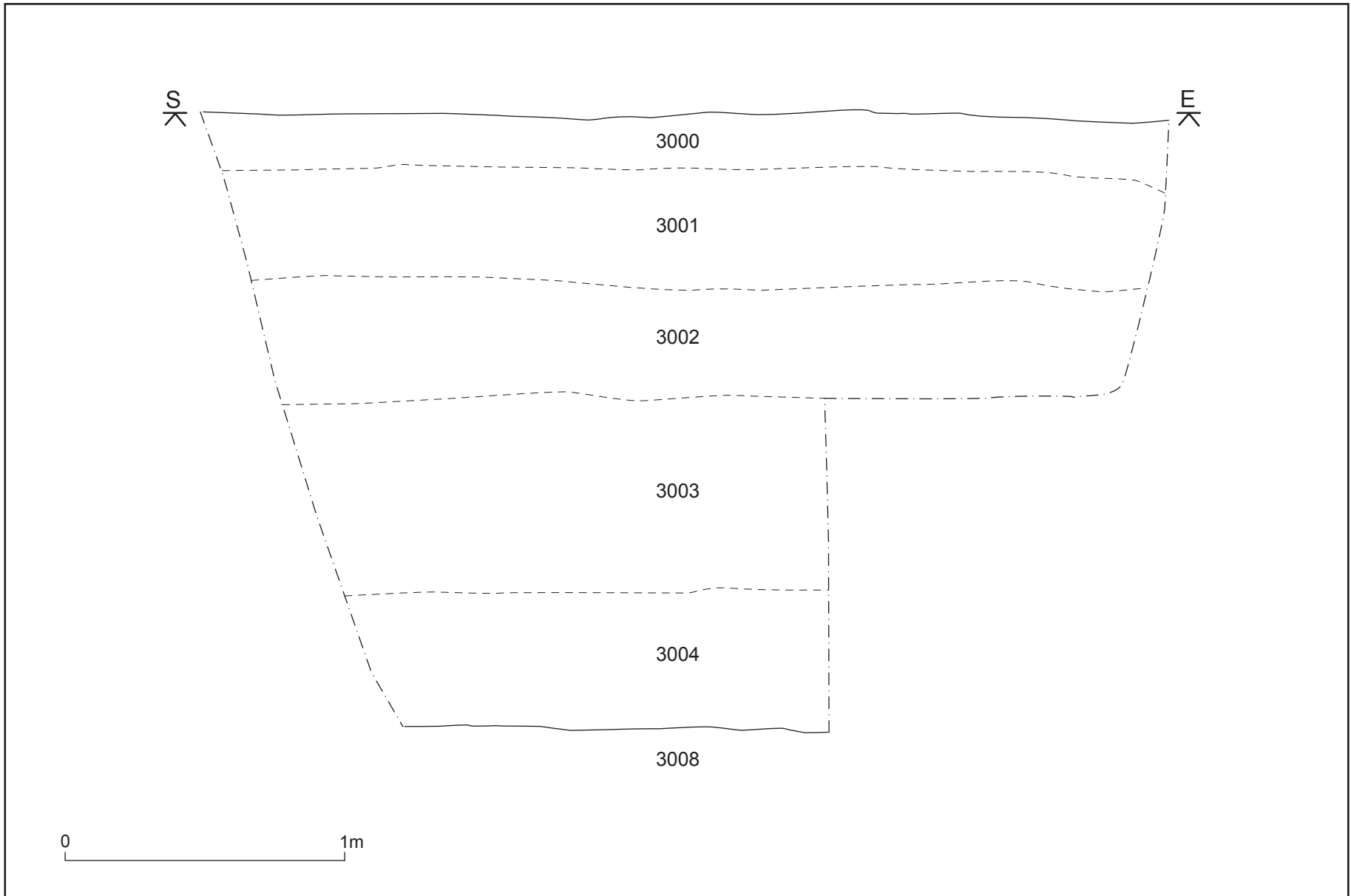


Fig.3

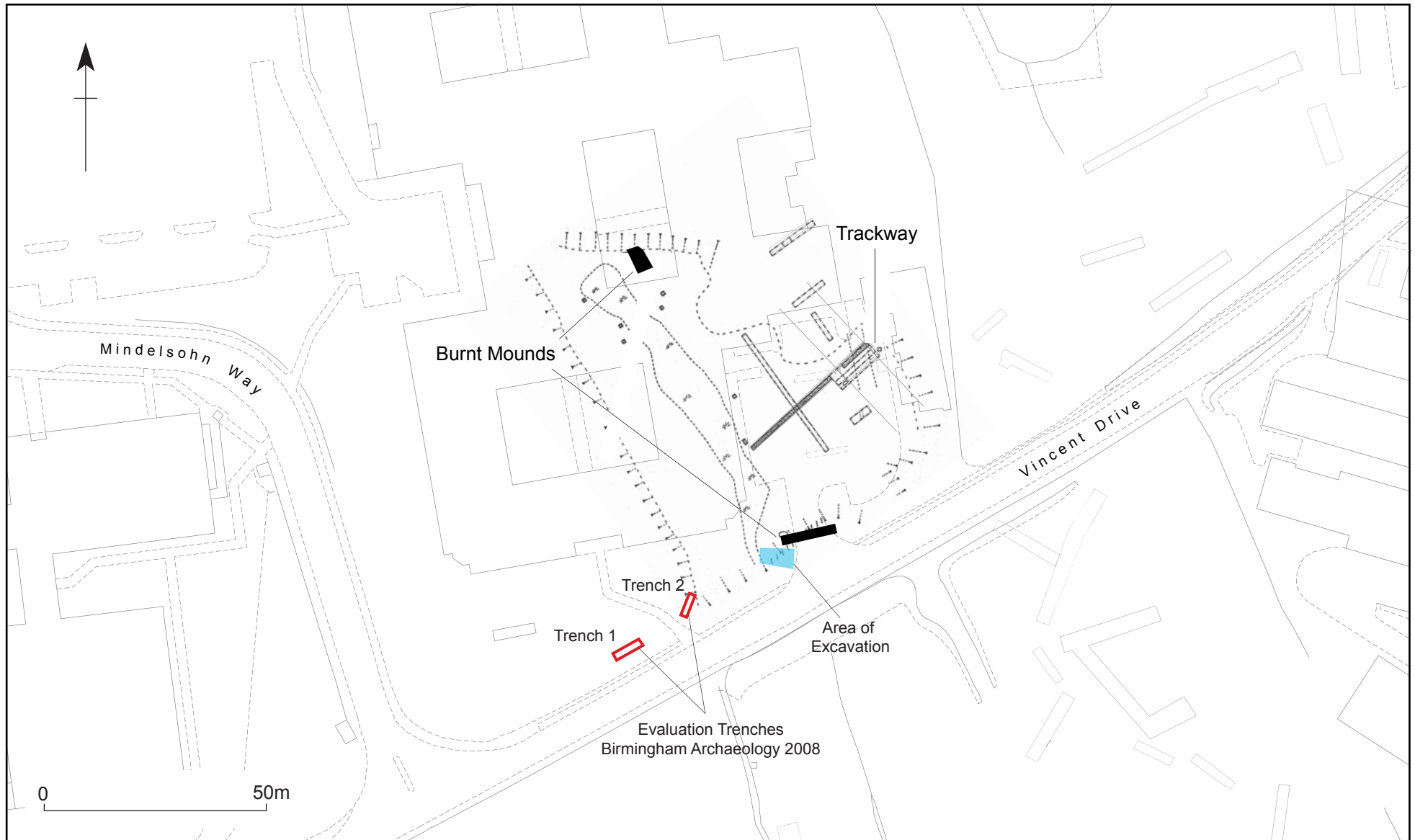


Fig.4



Plate 1



Plate 2

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE
QE Psychiatric Hospital, Vincent Drive (area SP 0409 8354; SMR 01682)
Design Brief for *archaeological observation and recording***

1. Summary

Groundworks for development alongside Vincent Drive may affect archaeological remains including burnt mounds and environmental data contained in a former stream course. This brief is for excavation of a small area, under archaeological supervision, and any archaeological features exposed are to be recorded.

2. Site location and description

The part of the site referred to in this brief is on the north side of Vincent Drive, adjacent to the existing QE Psychiatric Hospital entrance drive. It is currently occupied by grass.

3. Planning background

The existing QE Psychiatric Hospital is to be demolished and its site occupied by new build forming part of a new acute hospital. Part of the works involve removal of all deposits overlying subsoil in the area referred to in this brief.

4. Existing archaeological information

The site lies to the west of a series of Roman forts and to the north-west of a vicus outside the forts. Archaeological recording on the QE Psychiatric Hospital site in 1988 and 1989 consisted of trenches, sondages and observations in advance of and during groundworks associated with the construction of the existing building. Three burnt mounds of probable Bronze Age date and associated features were located, alongside a north-south stream channel. A desk-based archaeological assessment of the whole of the University Hospital area in 1999 identified a medium level of archaeological survival in the area between QEPH and Vincent Drive.

Two evaluation trenches excavated in 2008 revealed no archaeological features, however the location and extent of these was restricted by existing features. The subsoil in both trenches was overlain by 900mm to 1200mm of overlying deposits.

5. Requirements for work

Because of the potential survival of archaeological remains, including burnt mounds and palaeoenvironmental deposits in the former stream line, the deposits overlying the subsoil are to be removed under archaeological supervision and any archaeological features exposed are to be recorded.

6. Stages of work

All deposits overlying the subsoil surface are to be mechanically removed, under the supervision of an appropriately skilled and qualified archaeologist. Any

archaeological features exposed are to be recorded by written description, drawing and photography. No archaeological excavation is to be undertaken other than cleaning exposed deposits for better definition. Adequate time is to be allowed for observation and recording to take place. Finds are to be retrieved as they are revealed during groundworks or cleaning. Deposits likely to provide information on past environmental conditions are to be sampled and analysed. It is anticipated that such deposits may survive in the former stream channel. Finds are to be cleaned, marked and bagged and any remedial conservation work undertaken.

7. Staffing

The archaeological observation and recording is to be carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct, Standards, Guidelines and practices of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and all staff are to be suitably qualified and experienced for their roles in the project. It is recommended that the project be under the direct supervision of a Member or Associate Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

8. Written Scheme of Investigation

Potential contractors should present a Written Scheme of Investigation which details methods and staffing. It is recommended that the proposal be submitted to the City Council's Planning Archaeologist before a contractor is commissioned, to ensure that it meets the requirements of this brief.

9. Monitoring

The archaeological observation and recording must be carried out to the satisfaction of Birmingham City Council, and will be monitored by the Planning Archaeologist.

10. Reporting

The results of the archaeological observation and recording are to be presented as a written report, containing appropriate illustrations. A bound hard copy of the report and an electronic copy in pdf format must be sent to the Planning Archaeologist.

11. Archive deposition

The written, drawn and photographic records of the archaeological observation and recording, together with any finds, must be deposited with an appropriate repository within a reasonable time of completion, following consultation with the Planning Archaeologist.

12. Publication

The written report will become publicly accessible, as part of the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record, within six months of completion. The contractor must submit a short summary report for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology* and appropriate period journals.

On completion of the project the contractor must complete the obligatory fields of the OASIS form and submit an electronic version of the report to OASIS (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis>)

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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