
HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST
Report No. 1348

**COVENTRY CANAL BASIN,
ST NICHOLAS STREET, COVENTRY**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING AND RECORDING**

City of Coventry
NGR: SP 3328 7960
Site Code: HAT 714

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COVENTRY CANAL BASIN, ST NICHOLAS STREET, COVENTRY ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING.

SUMMARY

During March to May 2003, Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) undertook a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording at the Coventry Canal Basin, St Nicholas Street, Coventry. The work was undertaken during groundworks associated with a programme of redevelopment, which primarily included the construction of a four-storey building comprising a bar / restaurant with residential apartments above.

Despite being situated in an area of historic interest for the development of the canal basin during the 18th century, no archaeological finds or features were identified during the programme of monitoring. Extensive evidence of previous truncation of the site since the 18th century was evident.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Between March and May 2003, Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording at the Coventry Canal Basin, St Nicholas Street, Coventry (centred on NGR SP 3328 7960) (Figs. 1 & 2). The work was commissioned by the Anthony Rickett Partnership on behalf of Barteak Developments Ltd. in advance of and during redevelopment of the site to create residential apartments and a bar / restaurant. The local planning authority (Coventry City Council) required a programme of archaeological work to be undertaken as a condition of the planning consent (I Soden, dated August 2002).

1.2 The programme of archaeological monitoring / recording was undertaken according to a brief for the project issued by Coventry City Council Planning Archaeologist (CCC PA) (I Soden, dated August 2002; *Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief Part B (Site-specific, city centre environs* and *Brief for Set-Piece Archaeological Excavation, Part A (Generic)*), and a specification prepared by HAT (dated 4th March 2003). It also complied with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' (IFA) *Code of Conduct and Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (1994, revised 1999).

1.3 The project objectives were

- To ensure the archaeological excavation and monitoring of all aspects of the development programme likely to affect buried archaeological remains;
- To secure the adequate recording of any archaeological remains revealed by the development programme;

- To secure the full analysis and interpretation of the site archive and the appropriate publication of the project results, as appropriate; and
- To secure the analysis, long term conservation and storage of the project archive

1.3 The specific archaeological requirements of the project are summarised below:

- Monitoring of all groundworks
- Mitigation by a programme of archaeological excavation and recording, if archaeological remains are encountered
- Assessment (where necessary)
- Post excavation and publication (where necessary)

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE (Figs. 1 & 2)

2.1 Coventry lies on a solid geology of Keuper Marl above sandstone and coal seams. The city centre lies on a hill adjacent to the River Sherbourne, a tributary of the Warwickshire Avon.

2.2 The site lies in the northern part of Coventry city centre, on the edge of the Draper's Fields area to the immediate north of the ring road of St Nicholas (located at NGR SP 3397 7960). It comprises a subsquare former car park bounded to the west by Leicester Row/St Nicholas Street, to the south by the Coventry Canal Basin, to the east by a block-paved piazza adjacent to James Brindley House and to the north by another car park fronting Draper's Fields. A retaining wall bounds the site to the north.

2.3 The site lies at an average height of 92m AOD, with land rising steadily to the north.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 There have been occasional prehistoric finds from the vicinity, but these are generally deemed residual, and not indicative of significant occupation.

3.2 Romano-British finds remains are known to exist on the edge of the city, in areas such as the eastern bypass, Baginton and Warwick University, though the potential for Roman remains in the area of the later city remains largely untested by widespread excavation.

3.3 Little early/middle Saxon occupation remains are also notable by their recorded absence to date, although most of former villages within the suburban area of the present city (in common with much of the country) have likely later Saxon origins. A priory was founded in Coventry, possibly as early as the ninth century. The city grew up around the priory, which became a Benedictine cathedral, achieving status as an important commercial centre by the 12th century. Further religious foundations followed, and the city was defended by a wall.

3.4 By the sixteenth century the town was in decline, as is evident by the 1523 census and the John Speed map of 1610. The town became strategically important during the Civil War, when the town wall was first strengthened and then demolished in places.

3.5 By the eighteenth century, skilled labour had returned to the town, aided by the arrival of the canal in 1769, and then the railway in 1838. Industry retained a significant presence in the town into the twentieth century, and during the Second World War, this became a prominent target for bombing, resulting in widespread destruction of the mediaeval core.

3.6 The site itself was developed as a canal basin in the later 18th century, though the CCC brief notes that the site is shown as open in the early to mid 19th century. The construction of the canal and its adjacent terracing is thought to have truncated any potential earlier archaeological remains. The area is also known to have been heavily incendiary-bombed in 1940.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The archaeological monitoring and recording was conducted in accordance with the brief and specification, and also complied with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (revised 1999). Ground reduction and foundation/service excavation were monitored by an Archaeological Project Officer. Exposed surfaces were inspected for archaeological finds and features, cleaned by hand as necessary, drawn to scale, photographed and recorded on *pro forma* sheets as appropriate. Excavated spoil was searched for residual finds, and a metal detector used as necessary to enhance finds recovery.

5 RESULTS (Fig. 3)

5.1 Phase 1 of sub-surface building works comprised a large foundation platform (24m x 18m). This was mechanically excavated on the previous site of the car park adjacent to James Brindley House. A large degree of subsurface disturbance was evident due to the construction of the car park, which directly overlay the natural clay and sand stone deposits. There were no archaeological finds or features identified in this area.

Sample Section:

0.00 - 0.25m	L1000	Made ground. Tarmac and hardcore.
0.25 - 0.8m	L1001	Natural stiff red fine clay. Of variable depth and consistency.
0.8m+	L1002	Natural red sand stone.

5.2 Phase 2 of building works involved the creation of 11 columns forming the glass frontage of the first floor restaurant, on the canal basin side of the development. A similar sequence was observed to the adjacent foundation platform, with columns excavated to a significant depth. No archaeological finds or features were observed.

Sample Section

0.00 - 0.30m	L1000	Made ground. Tarmac and hardcore.
0.30 – 0.8m	L1001	Natural stiff red fine clay. Of variable depth and consistency.
0.8m+	L1002	Natural red sand stone.

6 CONFIDENCE RATING

6.1 No factors were identified as hindering the recognition of archaeological features and finds during the monitoring and recording.

7 DEPOSIT MODEL

7.1 In the area of the residential development, the compact natural marly clay was found to directly underlie the modern rubble and tarmac surface at a depth of approximately 0.25-0.30m below the existing ground level. Natural red sand stone was recorded at a depth of 0.80m. Obvious truncation of the natural deposits had occurred, with no former land surfaces surviving.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 No archaeological finds or features were observed were identified on this site. Previous truncation of the ground surface had clearly occurred, probably during the original construction of the canal basin, and certainly during the construction of the previous cart park, bounded to the north by a steep retaining wall indicative of terracing. No canalside features survived in the areas monitored.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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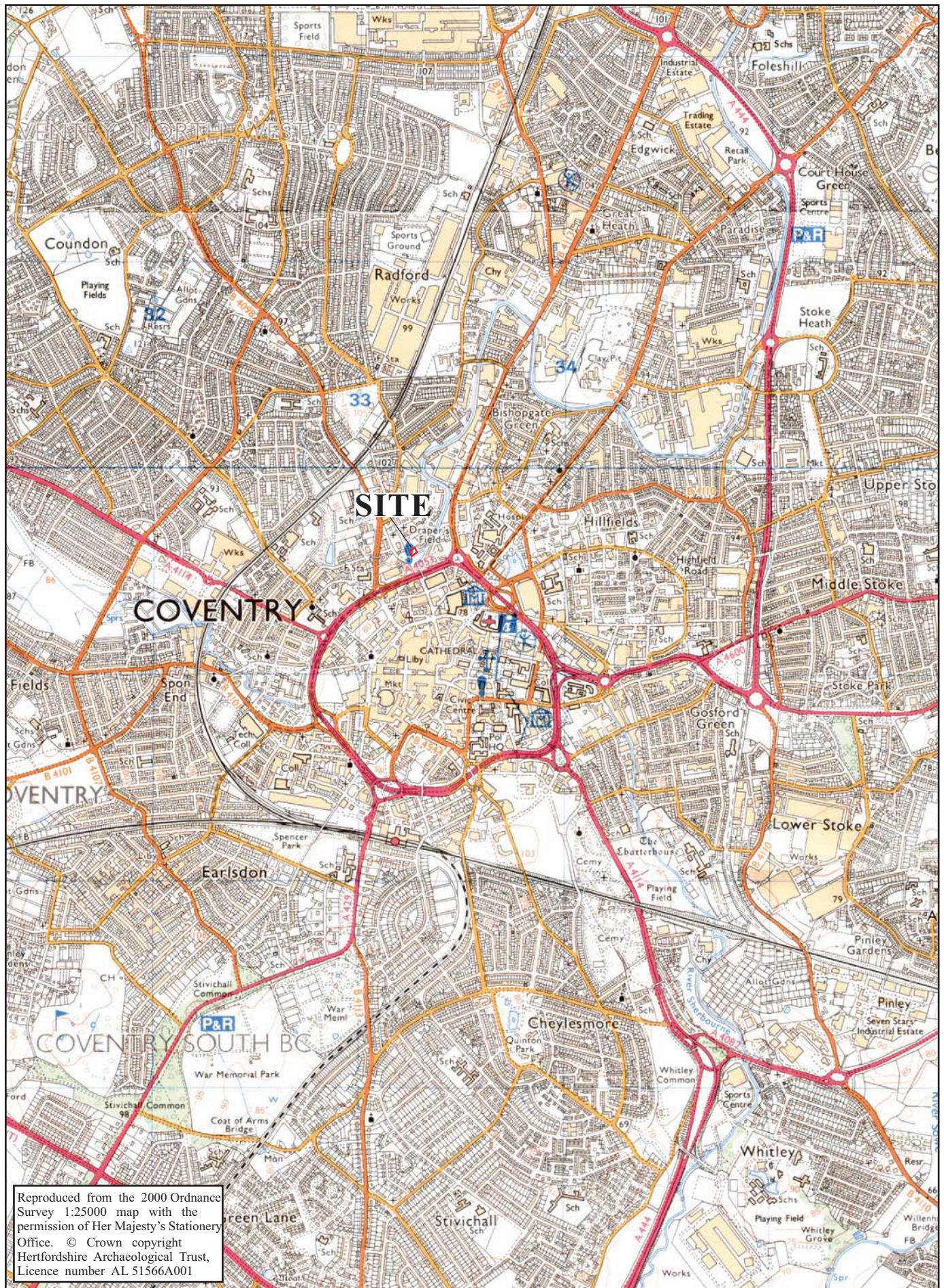
HAT would like to thank Mr Iain Soden of Coventry City Council for his input and kind advice.

REFERENCES

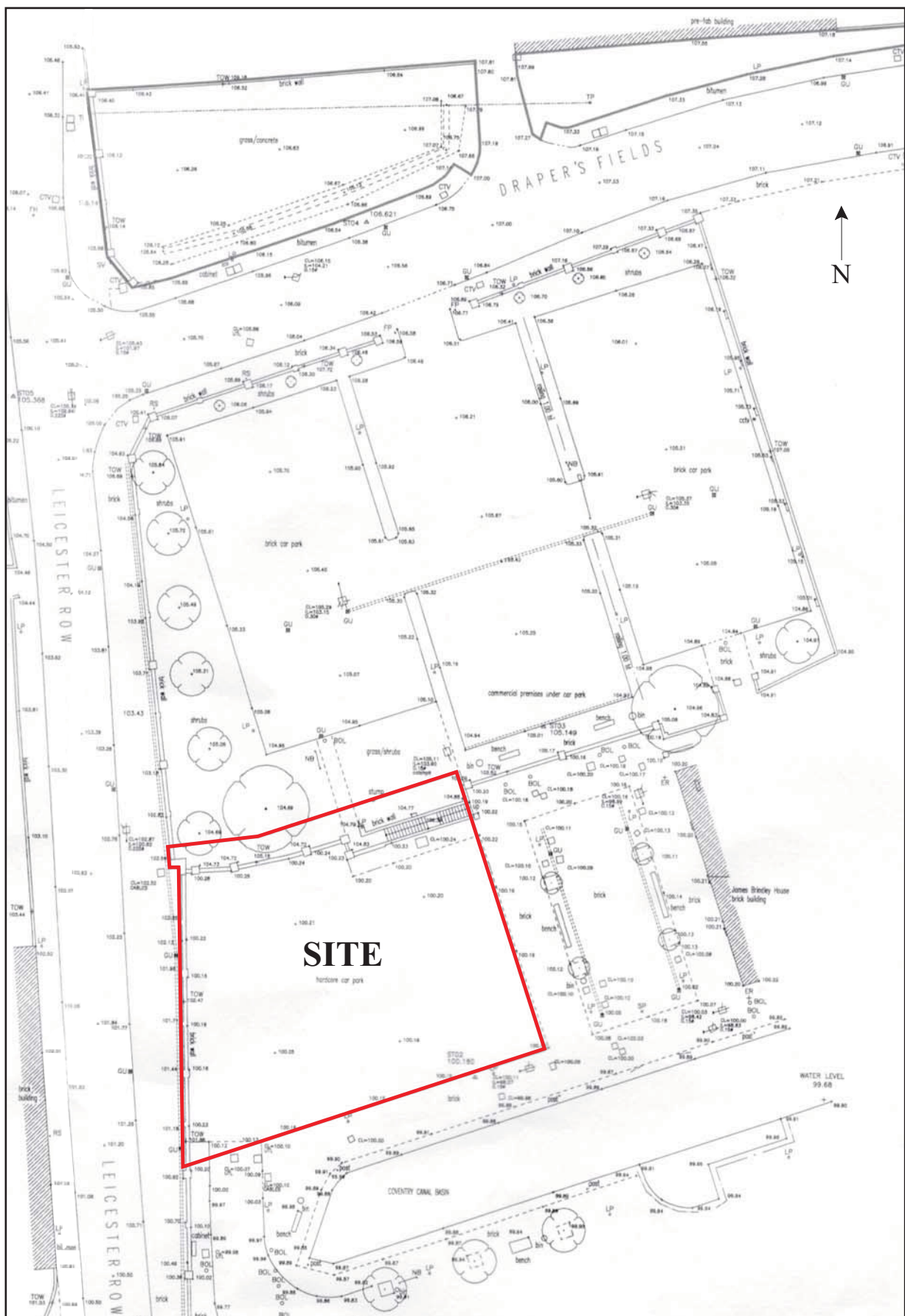
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Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust
Fig.1 Site Location
 Scale: 1:25000



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Fig.2 Site As Existing

Scale: 1:500

