

Archaeological Field Evaluation



Land at The Green & Booth Street
Darlaston
Near Walsall
West Midlands
WS10 8JP

On behalf of

Fitzpatrick Group

August 2020

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1 Non-Technical Summary

Border Archaeology was instructed by the Fitzpatrick Group to carry out an Archaeological Field Evaluation of a former industrial site adjacent to The Green, Darlaston, which was latterly occupied by modern light industrial premises.

The site lies close to of the medieval settlement of Darlaston, an Archaeological Priority Area, which is thought to have developed after the Norman Conquest, but may be of Anglo-Saxon origin.

During the 19th Century industrialization of the area, the site was occupied by the Eagle Nut and Bolt works, which was established by Wiley James & Sons Limited in 1860 for the manufacture of 'bolts & nuts of all descriptions'. There was thus considered to be potential to encounter surviving below-ground structural remains associated with the 19th Century industrial premises.

Two trenches were opened, each measuring 30m x 1.8m, Trench 002 being subsequently stepped in order to attain a depth sufficient to achieve full deposit characterisation.

The trenches revealed heavy disturbance throughout, with mixed deposits consisting of late 19th Century/Modern demolition material and redeposited natural. Evidence of debris such as plastic cabling and sheeting were indicative of more recent deposits, probably associated with the former light industrial unit.

No structural remains were encountered, and any evidence relating to earlier settlement activity had been entirely removed by successive phases of construction, demolition and redevelopment of the site.

2 Introduction

Border Archaeology (BA) was instructed by Mark Fitzpatrick of Fitzpatrick Group to carry out an Archaeological Field Evaluation (AFE) of a former industrial site designated as Land at The Green & Booth Street Darlaston WS10 8JP (*fig.1*) in connection with the demolition of an existing building and the erection of 24 new affordable residential units, access, landscaping and associated works (Planning Ref. 19/0768).

This Report is for submission in the first instance to Eleanor Ramsey Archaeology and Historic Environment Officer (AHEO) City of Wolverhampton Council.

3 Site Description

The site lies within the SW part of the Borough of Walsall, which is described as being relatively flat, rising gently towards the N, with slight summits at Darlaston and Bentley.

Much of the townscape developed after the 1930s, but the town centre contains 19th Century buildings and Catherine Cross and Darlaston Green were in existence by 1750, while the central area has medieval origins. Darlaston Green, within the medieval settlement area, is characterised by mixed late 19th Century terraced housing and more recent properties (Oxford Archaeology South 2019, paras. 4.1.4, 4.2.32).

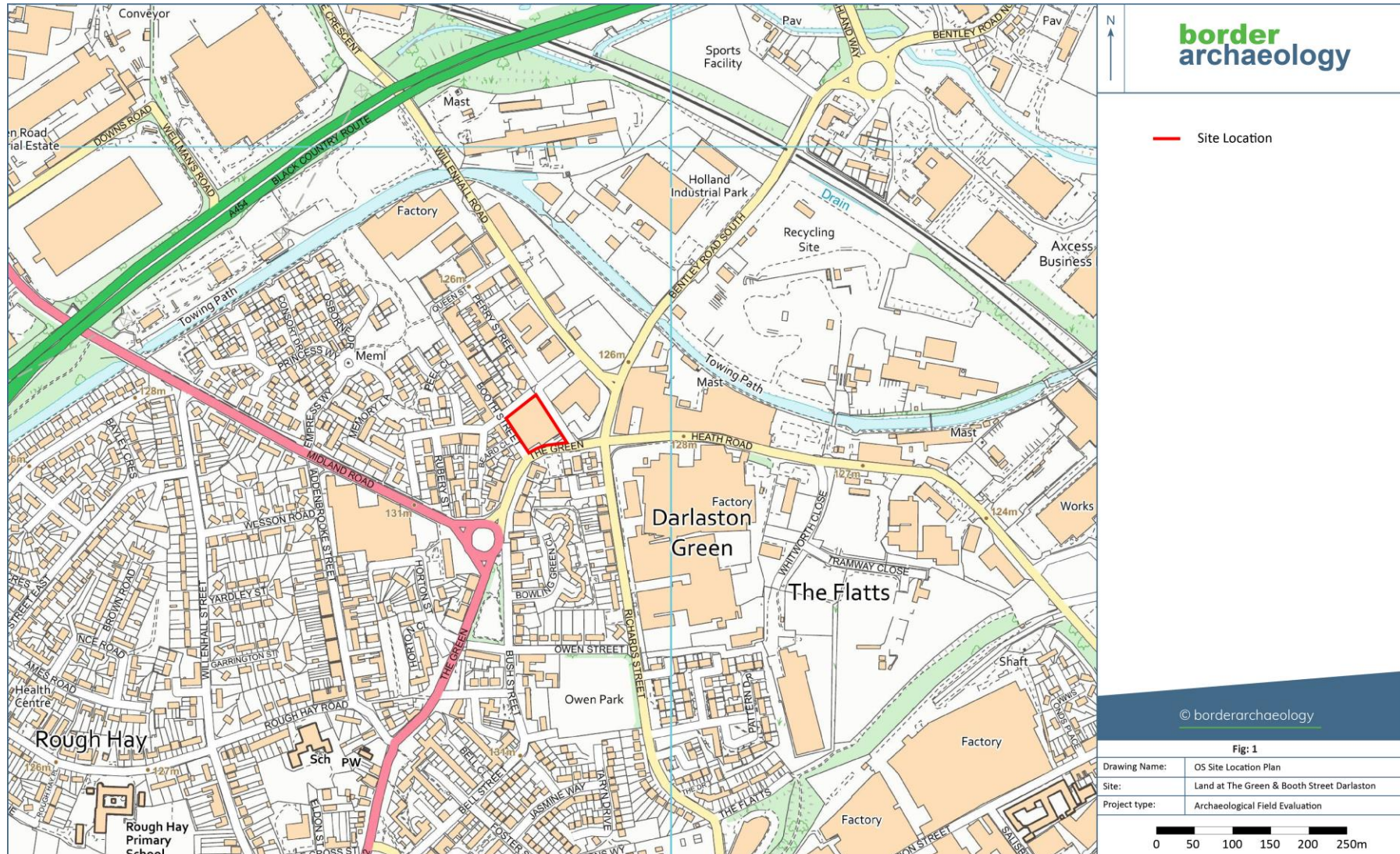
The site was square in plan with an area of 0.33ha and lay at an elevation of between 128.95m AOD to the NNE at the junction of Castle Street and Perry Street and 130.51m AOD to the SSW at the Booth Street junction with The Green. It is located roughly 0.95 km N of Darlaston Town Centre.

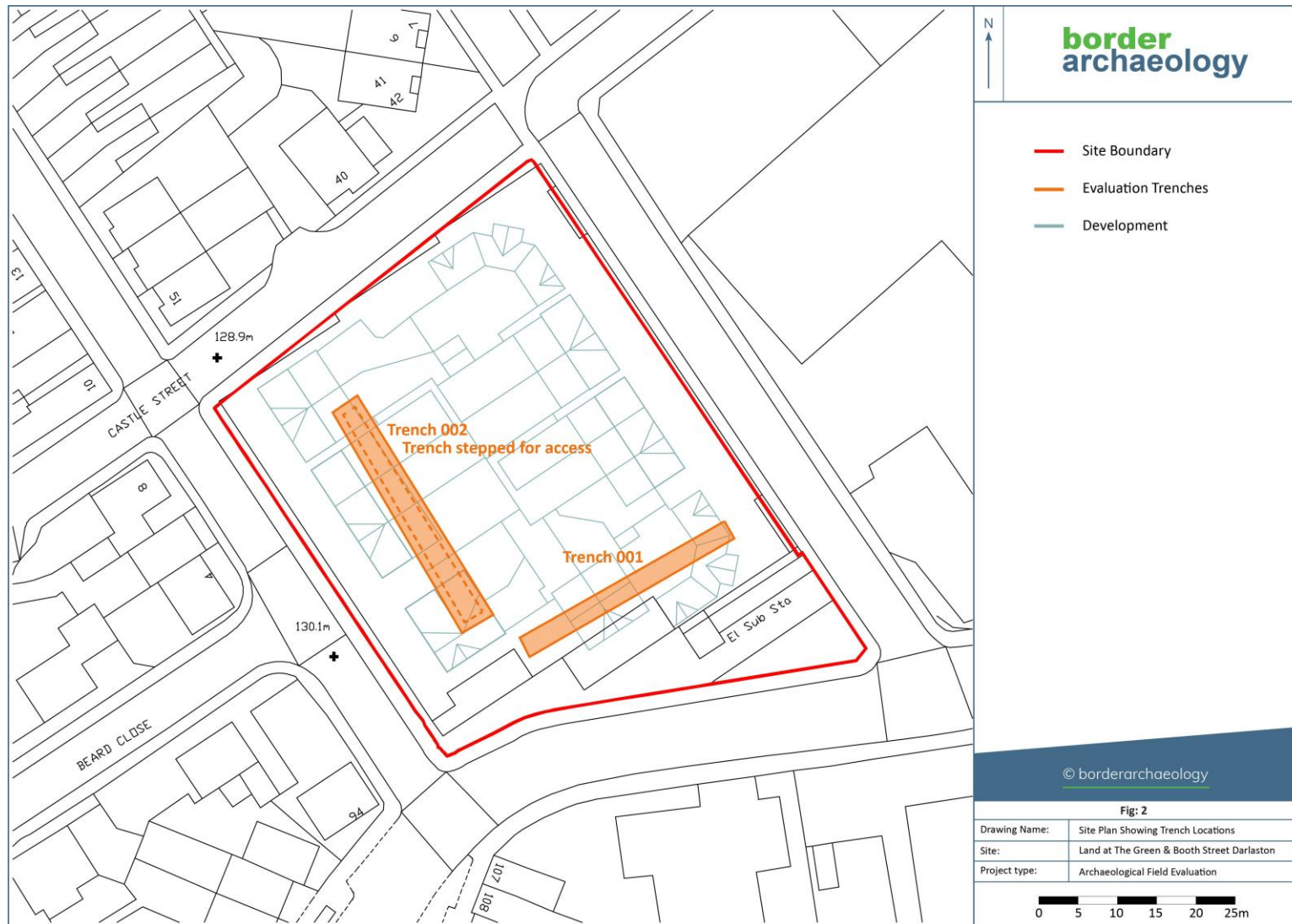
The site until recently comprised a vacant industrial unit consisting of a two-storey industrial building fronting onto The Green, disused since 2015 and now demolished. There was a separate electricity sub-station immediately to the front of the building but this has been removed (*fig. 2*). The immediate environs comprise mixed-use development to the NE and E, residential to the NW and residential, commercial and retail to the S.

The site lies within the northern part of the Darlaston Settlement Archaeological Priority Area (Walsall APA 44) and to the N of the Darlaston Conservation Area.

3.1 Soils & geology

Whilst the site was heavily disturbed due to the demolition of the former industrial unit and electricity sub-station, this area in general is overlain by superficial deposits of sandy till and gravel overlying a sedimentary bedrock of the Pennine Middle Coal Measures Formation (British Geological Society 2020).





Borehole survey data from within the immediate vicinity of the site to the E indicates a moderately compact fill of ash, brick rubble and gravel to a depth of 2.7m overlying soft brown and grey silty clay. The water level on completion of boring was 2.4m bgl.

A borehole immediately to the W encountered made ground of loose black angular to sub-rounded fine to coarse gravel, brick, plastic metal cloth and wood in a black sand and ash matrix to 1.8m overlying a further made ground deposit of soft to firm yellow-brown and green-yellow to black slightly sandy clay with some sub-angular to sub-rounded fine to coarse gravel with brick, quartz and coal to 2.1m. Underlying this was a firm brown-red clay with some pockets grey silt and some sub-angular and sub-rounded gravel of coal and cobbles of siltstone.

A neighbouring second borehole to the W contained made ground of loose black fine to medium sand and ash with frequent sub-angular fine to coarse gravel of road-stone, brick and occasional plastic, wire, cloth, pipe and wood to 1.6-1.8m. Underlying this was a firm brown-red and cream sandy clay with occasional sub-angular to sub-rounded fine to coarse gravel of quartz and coal to a depth of 3m above loose red-brown slightly clayey fine to medium sand (British Geological Society 2020).

4 Archaeological Background

The paucity of prehistoric and Romano-British activity may be partially attributable to the legacy of a long history of coalmining in this area, which is likely to have destroyed any previously surviving archaeological remains, although there is little evidence to suggest the area was a focus for early settlement and it is in general not noted for any significant Romano-British activity. The earliest known archaeological deposits in the Darlaston area date to the medieval period (Conway 2002, 3).

4.1 Site specific

The site is that of the former Eagle Nut and Bolt works established by Wiley James & Sons Limited in 1860. The firm manufactured 'bolts & nuts of all descriptions', made by hand and machine in iron or steel. Other products included set screws, engineers' studs, coupling boxes, builders' roof iron work, bed screws, handrail screws, 'Excelsior' spout clips, horseshoe frost studs, iron gates and hurdles and latches. The firm had a large export market and was advertising its products well into the mid-20th Century (<http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/Darlaston/Industries.htm>). There was thus considered to be potential to encounter surviving below-ground remains associated with the industrial premises.

The location of the site in the immediately vicinity of the medieval settlement of Darlaston (APA44), thought to have developed after the Norman Conquest but potentially (based on place-name evidence) having an Anglo-Saxon origin, suggested early remains might be encountered, although any such deposits were thought likely to have been severely impacted or removed in their entirety by later industrial use and associated demolition activity.

5 Research Aims & Objectives

Previous ground investigations had suggested the presence of 1-3m of made ground with a need for ground remediation (piling or rafting) potentially affecting any surviving remains. The evaluation thus sought to clarify the nature and extent of existing disturbance and intrusion and assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits, providing information on the presence of potentially significant archaeological remains to inform any further programme of mitigation.

Specific research themes identified in *The Archaeology of the West Midlands: A Framework for Research* (Watt 2011) as being of particular relevance included the need for ‘a fuller understanding of sites of all periods’ (Hodder 2011, 248) with particular emphasis in this case on post-medieval, industrial and contemporary archaeology (Belford 2011, 221, 229).

It was noted that the industrialisation of the West Midlands began at an early stage and the scale of operations was ‘smaller and less proscriptive’ than in the industrial heartlands of Manchester and Sheffield and was characterised by ‘the quasi-independent social worlds of the chain- and nail-making industries of Worcestershire and the Black Country’ (Belford 2011, 221).

It was further noted that, for industrial process sites, greater emphasis should be placed on exploring the earlier and smaller-scale industries for which traces above ground or in the documentary record are relatively slight with investigations to include provision for appropriate specialist scientific analysis (Belford 2011, 229).

6 Methodology

All archaeological site works were carried out in accordance with BA’s *Archaeological Field Manual* (2017) and with accepted professional standards, including *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers’ Guide* (Lee 2015), *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2020a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014). BA recognises the requirements of the *ClfA Code of conduct* (2019a).

6.1 Site Specific

Two trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision, each initially measuring 30m × 1.80m, Trench 002 later being stepped to achieve a greater excavation depth. Due to an onsite obstruction, Trench 002 was moved slightly to the SW from the location shown in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (BA 2019). Trench locations were recorded using survey-grade GPS (*fig. 2*).

The site consisted largely of late post-medieval/modern demolition material and associated debris, with no topsoil or subsoil present. Where possible, this material was removed in level spits by machine and flat-bladed grading bucket.

No significant horizon was encountered and archaeologically-controlled machine excavation continued down to the natural substrate, with Trench 002 being stepped-out so as to safely attain a depth exceeding 1.2m in order to fully characterise deposits in this area.

Each trench was cleaned by hand sufficient to characterise and record the deposits, with each trench drawn at an appropriate scale. Spot levels were taken as appropriate.

All BA staff undertaking the fieldwork were suitably qualified and experienced to discharge their project roles effectively, fully cognisant of aims and methodologies and suitably equipped to carry out the work.

6.2 Recording

Full written, graphic and photographic records were made in accordance with BA's *Archaeological Field Recording Manual* (2017). The written record comprised an individual pro forma context record for each stratigraphic unit.

Each context record included the following details as a minimum: character, contextual relationships, detailed description (dimensions and shape; soil components, colour, texture and consistency), associated finds, interpretation and phasing, and cross-referencing to drawn, photographic and finds registers.

Representative sections were drawn on gridded, archive stable polyester film at a scale of 1:10, a temporary benchmark (TBM) being established relative to Ordnance Survey levelling data. All drawings were numbered and listed in a drawing register; these drawing numbers being cross-referenced to written site records.

6.3 Recovery, Processing & Curation of Artefactual Data

No finds of archaeological significance were recovered from the site.

6.4 Palaeoenvironmental/Palaeoeconomic Sampling

No deposits suitable for palaeoenvironmental sampling were encountered.

7 Results

See Appendix for full context tabulation.

7.1 Trench 001

Trench 001 was oriented ENE/WSW (*Plates 1 & 2; figs. 2 & 3*).

No topsoil or subsoil were encountered, the uppermost layer (001001) consisting of a firmly compacted mixed demolition deposit largely consisting of rubble from of the former light industrial unit. This extended across the entirety of the trench to a thickness of 0.85-0.9m and was underlain at the WSW extent of the trench by (001002), a further spread of demolition material to a depth of c.0.85m. (001002) consisting of firmly compacted sandy clay containing frequent coal and post-medieval CBM, together with occasional metal.

A firm yellow-brown clay sand containing ironstone and occasional coal (001003) was encountered at the base of the trench forming the top of the natural substrate, this being confirmed in a *sondage* dug at the WSW end. (001003) was directly overlain at the ENE extent by (001001).



Plate 1: Trench 001 looking ENE



Plate 2: Trench 001 looking WSW.

7.2 Trench 002

Trench 002 was aligned NNW/SSE and was stepped in order to safely attain a depth sufficient to fully characterise the deposits and to confirm the absence of any significant archaeological levels.

No topsoil or subsoil were encountered, the uppermost layer (002001) consisting of the same demolition/hardcore material (001001) encountered in Trench 001, which extended to a depth of c.0.6m. Underlying (002001) at the SSE extent of the trench was (002002), a firm mixed pale brown/black clay with grey flecking consisting of waste coal/slag and CBM extending to a thickness of up to 2.4m.

This deposit filled a large demolition cut [002004] with a gradual break of slope at the top and gradually sloping sides, the full extent of which was not visible within the trench. [002004] cut (002005), a firm brown/grey redeposited clay containing frequent coal fragments, which was visible in the SSE portion of the trench extending to a thickness of >0.3m. (002005) overlay natural (002003) consisting of a firm yellow brown clay sand, which was revealed at the base of the trench at an overall depth of c.2.7m.



Plate 3: Trench 2 looking NNW

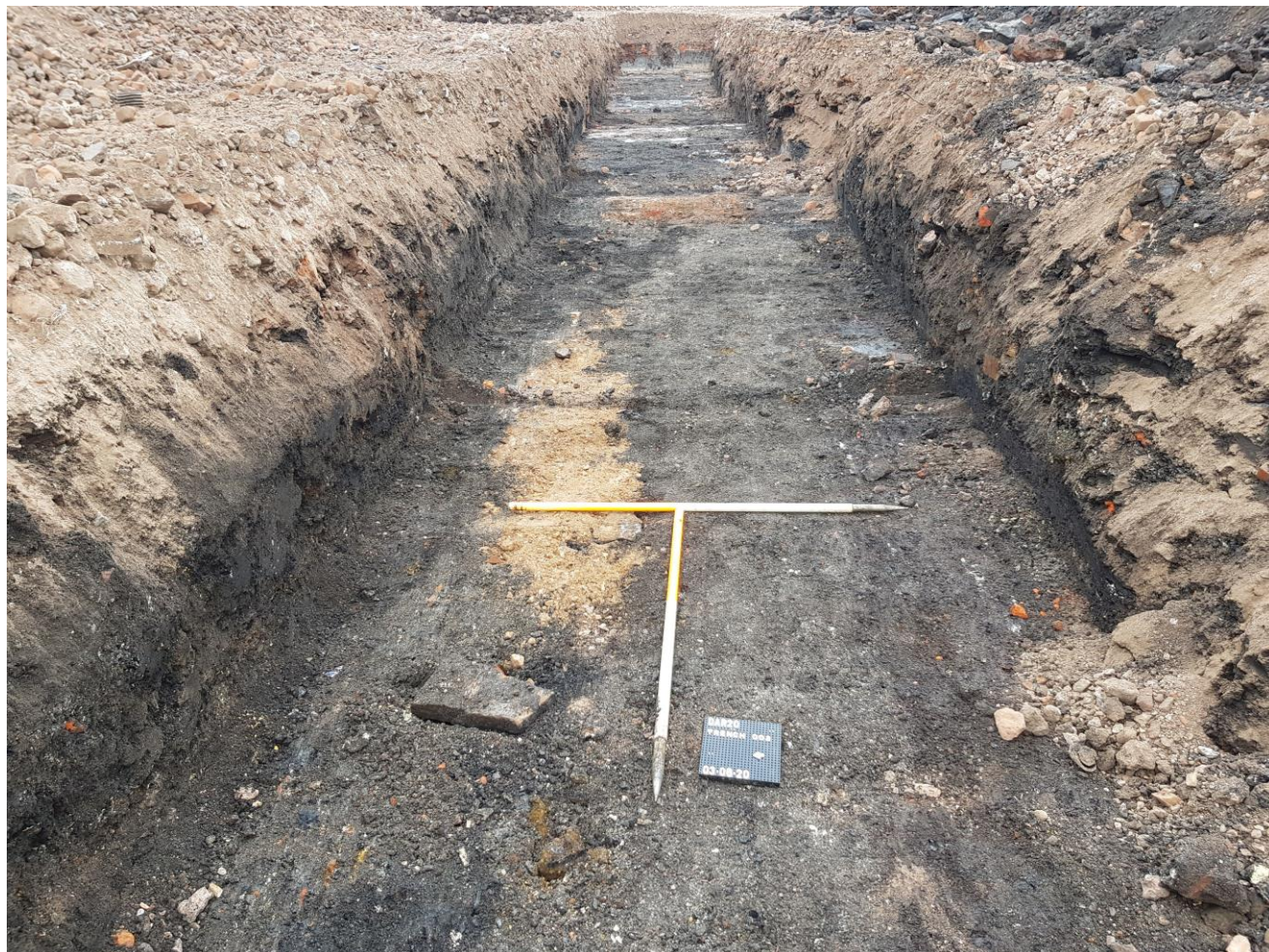


Plate 4: Trench 002 looking SSE



Plate 5: View WSW showing ENE-facing section of Trench 002

8 Conclusion

No archaeological structures, features or deposits were encountered in either trench, both of which revealed a mixture of heavily disturbed sandy clay soils and late 19th Century/Modern demolition rubble. Evidence of debris such as plastic cabling and sheeting were indicative of more recent deposits, probably associated with the former light industrial unit. The depth of disturbance in both areas of the site was such that any archaeological features or deposits would have been removed in their entirety.

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10.1 Soils & geology

Whilst the site was heavily disturbed due to the demolition of the former industrial unit and electricity sub-station, this area in general is overlain by superficial deposits of sandy till and gravel overlying a sedimentary bedrock of the Pennine Middle Coal Measures Formation (British Geological Society 2020).

11 Appendix: Context Tabulation

11.1 Trench 001

Context	Type	Filled by	Fill of	Description	Interpretation	Finds	Samples	Provisional date
(001001)	Deposit	-	-	Firmly compacted sandy clay; very frequent small to large sub-angular stones, moderate/frequent brick, occasional modern cable, plastic etc.; 0.85-0.9m thick. Same as (002001).	Demolition rubble/hardcore from of former light industrial unit.	-	-	Modern
(001002)	Deposit	-	-	Firmly compacted light-mid-brown sandy clay; frequent coal & post-medieval CBM, occasional metal.	Demolition material.	-	-	Late C19/Modern.
(001003)	Deposit	-	-	Firm yellow-brown clay sand containing ironstone and occasional coal	Natural substratum.	-	-	-

11.2 Trench 002

Context	Type	Filled by	Fill of	Description	Interpretation	Finds	Samples	Provisional date
(002001)	Deposit	-	-	Firmly compacted sandy clay; very frequent small to large sub-angular stones, moderate/frequent brick, occasional modern cable, plastic sheeting etc.; c.0.6m thick. Same as (001001).	Demolition rubble/hardcore.	-	-	Modern
(002002)	Deposit	-	[002004]	Firmly compacted mixed pale brown/black clay with grey flecking; frequent waste coal/slag & CBM; up to 2.4m thick. Fill of [002004].	Demolition material.	-	-	Late C19/Modern.
(002003)	Deposit	-	-	Firm yellow brown clay sand.	Natural substratum	-	-	-
[002004]	Cut	(002002)	-	Full extent not visible in trench; break of slope top gradual, sides gradually sloping, base unseen. Filled by (002002). Cuts (002005).	Demolition cut.	-	-	Late C19/Modern.

(002005)	Deposit	-	-	Firmly compacted brown/grey clay; frequent coal fragments; >0.3m thick. Cut by [002004].	Redeposited natural visible in the SSE portion of the trench.	-	-	Late C19/Modern.
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