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Rowley Village Surgery:
An Archaeological Watching Brief
2005

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Rowley Village Surveys: An Archaeological Watching Brief 2005

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Rowley Village Surgery: An archaeological watching brief 2005

Summary

In December 2005, an archaeological watching brief was carried out at Rowley Village Surgery, Rowley Village Road, Rowley Regis, Sandwell (centred on NGR SO 9712 8728) by Birmingham Archaeology. The watching brief was commissioned by Gould Singleton Partnership in advance of the construction of an extension to the rear of the Surgery, and was carried out during the excavation of a foundation trench for the extension. As the site is close to the historic medieval settlement core of Rowley Regis there was potential for the presence of associated archaeological features within the site. No archaeological features were noted, but a small amount of animal bone and post-medieval pottery was recovered.

1.0 Introduction

In December 2005, an archaeological watching brief was carried out at Rowley Village Surgery, Rowley Village Road, Rowley Regis, Sandwell (centred on NGR SO 9712 8728 and hereafter referred to as “the site”, Figs. 1 & 2). A planning application (DC/05/44236) was submitted to Sandwell MBC for the redevelopment of the site. As the site is close to the historic medieval settlement core of Rowley Regis, there was potential for the presence of associated archaeological features, and a watching brief was recommended by the Borough Archaeologist of Sandwell MBC as a condition of planning consent. The watching brief was commissioned by Gould Singleton Partnership in advance of the construction of an extension to the rear of the Surgery, and was carried out during the excavation of a foundation trench for the extension.

The work adhered to a written scheme of investigations prepared by Birmingham Archaeology and approved by Sandwell MBC.

2.0 Site description and location

The proposed development site (centred on NGR SO 9712 8728, Figs. 1 & 2, hereafter referred to as ‘the site’) is located at Rowley Village Surgery, Rowley Village Road, Rowley Regis, Sandwell. The site covers an area of 0.8 ha. Prior to the redevelopment work, the site contained a tarmac area to the rear of the present surgery building.

3.0 Archaeological and historical Background

Roman finds have been recovered from the Sandwell area, although no settlement sites have been recorded. Rowley Regis was part of the Saxon kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex, and the name Rowley may have come from the words “ruh Leah”, meaning a clearing in the forest. The village of Rowley is mentioned in the Domesday Book, and there has probably been a settlement at Rowley since pre-conquest times. After the Norman conquest, parts of Rowley were given to William Fitz-Ansculf, who built the castle at Dudley. There has probably been a church on the site of the present St. Giles Church, which is situated to the north of the site (Fig. 2), since the medieval period. The site is close to the historic settlement core around the

church, and medieval remains associated with the settlement may have extended into the site.

Coal mining and the iron industry developed rapidly in the area in the 18th and 19th centuries, growing from the nail-making industry, which may have begun during the medieval period. The First Edition OS map of 1884 shows the area developing from a rural landscape to an industrial area, and buildings can be seen on the frontage of Rowley Village Road, although these have subsequently been demolished.

4.0 Aims and Methodology

The aim of the watching brief was to monitor all groundworks, including the removal of all overburden and the excavation of foundation and service trenches, and to record the location, date, extent, character, condition, significance and quality of any exposed archaeological remains affected by the development, in order that they could be preserved by record.

A foundation trench (Fig. 3) was excavated by a mechanical digger, under the supervision of a qualified archaeologist. The exposed stratigraphy was recorded with a measured plan and section drawing and pre-printed pro-formas, supported by colour print photography. These records form the paper archive for the site, which will be deposited, along with the finds, with the Community History and Archives Service of Sandwell M. B. C. at the earliest opportunity, subject to the approval of the landowner.

All finds were recorded by context and were washed, marked and bagged according to standard IFA and Birmingham Archaeology practice, and given to the relevant specialist for identification. The finds archive is stable, and presents no long-term conservation problems.

5.0 Results

The natural subsoil (1003) was first encountered at a depth of 0.51m at the northern end of the site. The natural subsoil was a compact orange sandy clay. This was overlain by a layer of dark grey / black silty clay (1002), which contained animal bone and post-medieval pottery. This layer was 0.28m thick at the northern end of the foundation trench, but became thicker, following the slight downhill slope of the site, and was 1.10m thick at the southern end of the foundation trench. A backfilled brick-built manhole of possibly mid-Victorian date was also seen to cut layer 1002. This structure, backfilled with grey-black silty clay (1002) and rubble, was made from poor-quality traditionally-made bricks of probable local origin (Stephen Litherland, pers. comm.). Ceramic drains were also recorded cutting 1002.

Layer 1002 was also cut by a modern gas pipe, and was overlain by 0.13m of modern hardcore (1001), which acted as a base for the overlying layer of modern tarmac (1000) which covered the site.

No archaeological features were noted during the excavations.

6.0 The Finds – pottery identifications by Stephanie Rátkai

Three sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered from layer 1002. The earliest piece was a sherd of creamware of late 18th century date. A sherd of black-glazed coarseware or utilitarian ware from the late 18th – 19th century was also recovered from the same layer, as was a sherd from a flange rim bowl. This sherd was modern yellow ware, and dates to the early 19th century.

Three small pieces of animal bone were also recovered from the site (1002). Two of these fragments were from a rib, which had been sawn at one end.

7.0 Discussion

No significant archaeological features were noted during the excavations. Layer 1002 may have been used to build up and level the southern end of the site. This layer may have been laid down at the time the buildings shown on the First Edition OS map of 1884 were constructed. The brick-built manhole and sewer pipes may also be related to this now demolished building.

8.0 Acknowledgements

The watching brief was commissioned by Stephen Bullock of Gould Singleton Partnership. Thanks are due to John Hollyoak and his team for their help and co-operation on site.

Laurence Jones managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology, and the watching brief was carried out by Erica Macey-Bracken, who also wrote this report. Stephanie Rátkai commented on the pottery, and Stephen Litherland commented on the bricks. Illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds.



Fig.1

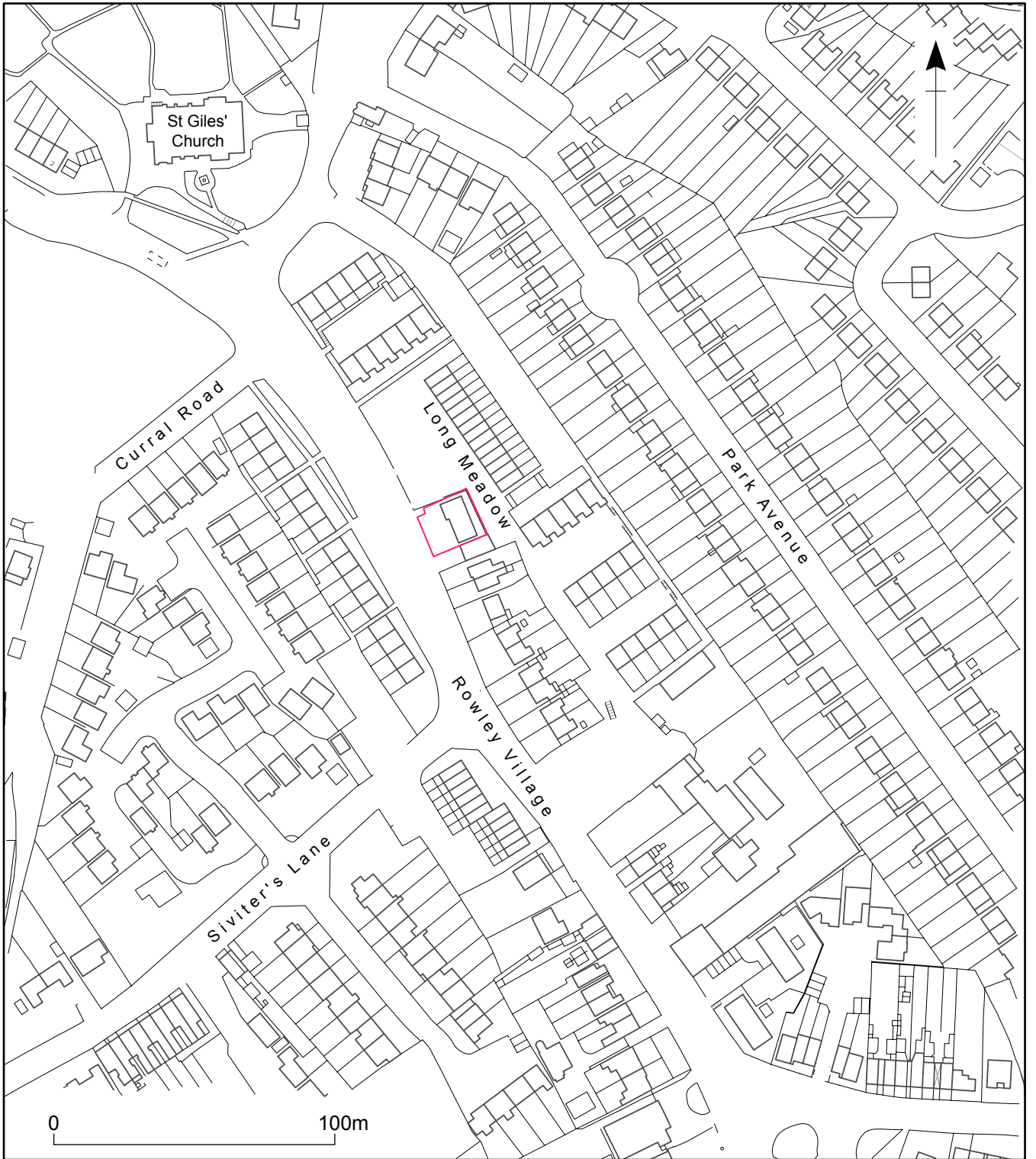


Fig.2

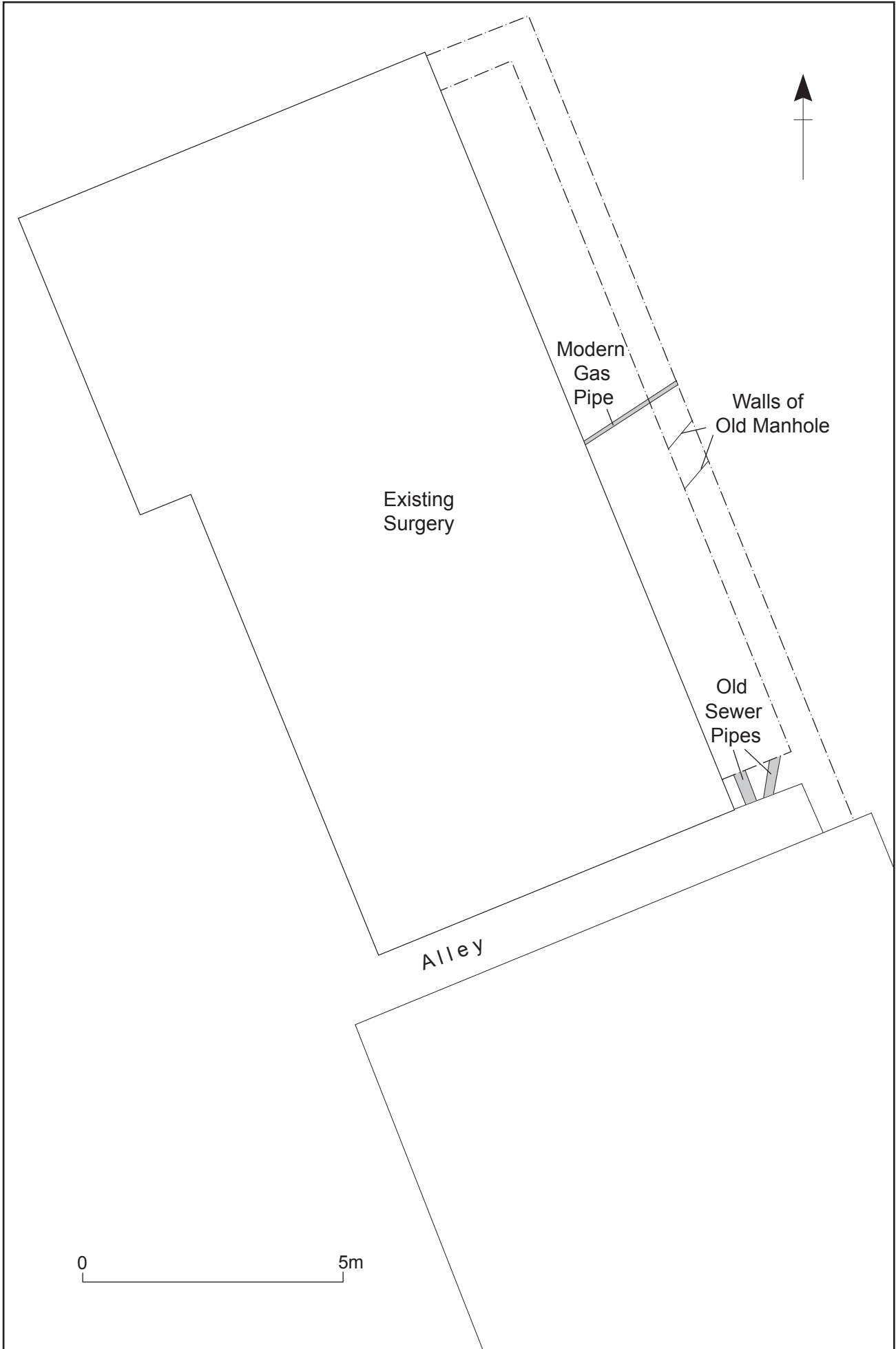


Fig.3