

# birmingham archaeology

Land off Aston Street, Wem,  
Shropshire:

an archaeological evaluation  
2007

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**Land off Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire:  
an archaeological evaluation 2007**

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**For  
Morris Homes (West Midlands) Limited**

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# LAND OFF ASTON STREET, WEM, SHROPSHIRE:

## AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION 2007

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## **SUMMARY**

*An archaeological evaluation of land off Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire (centred on NGR SJ 515 285) was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in March 2007. The evaluation took place in advance of a proposed residential development and aimed to locate the 17<sup>th</sup> century Civil War defences that, records suggested, passed through the site. Previous trial-trenching of the site, in 2001, investigating the area corresponding to the course of the defences, first depicted on early OS maps, found no evidence of the defences.*

*Three trial-trenches were excavated to locate and identify any archaeological remains associated with the defences that could be affected by the proposed development. One trial-trench revealed evidence of two wide adjacent parallel ditches that may have formed part of the Civil War defences. The secondary fill of one of the ditches contained sherds of late 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century pottery. The other ditch contained no finds and had a single fill that was consistent with rapid backfilling that may have occurred at the end of the Civil War. This was later recut by a ditch that contained a large amount of pottery dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Another trial-trench located a ditch, possibly a field boundary, of 18<sup>th</sup> century or earlier date.*

**LAND OFF ASTON STREET, WEM, SHROPSHIRE:  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION 2007.**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Background to the project**

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Morris Homes (West Midlands) Limited to undertake an archaeological evaluation ahead of a proposed residential development at land off Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire. The work was carried out as a condition of Planning Consent (Planning Application Number N/05/640/WU/33).

This report outlines the results of the field evaluation carried out between March 26<sup>th</sup> 2007 and March 30<sup>th</sup> 2007 and has been prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations (IFA 2001).

The evaluation conformed to a brief produced by Shropshire County Council (Appendix 2), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2007) (Appendix 3) which was approved by the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council prior to implementation, in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990).

**1.2 Location and geology**

The development area is located on land to the south of Aston Street, Wem, southeast of the historic town centre and is centred on NGR SJ 515 285 (Fig. 1, hereinafter referred to as the site).

The underlying drift geology consists of river terrace deposits of sand and gravel. The present character of the site is a mixture of hardstanding, where buildings belonging to a former timber yard have been demolished leaving concrete footings at ground level, and scrubland. One brick building associated with the former timber yard is still standing. To the north of the site are buildings fronting onto Aston Street. The site is enclosed to the east by fencing associated with a railway line that runs northeast to southwest. To the south the site bounded by the railway and a car park. To the west lies a large retail store and associated car park.

**2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Detailed historical background information can be found in an assessment carried out by Hereford and Worcester County Archaeological Service (Buteux 1996) and much of this section is a summary of information contained in this assessment report.

Wem was probably founded in the Anglo- Saxon period, and the town's name may refer to marshy areas adjacent to the River Roden which flows through the town. Wem was mentioned in the Domesday Survey and was held by William Pandulf for Earl Roger of Montgomery, at this time. Wem was the centre of a Barony which comprised of 29 manors. A motte and bailey castle was built by Hugh Pandulf in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1205 a grant from King John permitted a market to be held in Wem. The town suffered during the Wars of the Roses and the castle,

which may have been rebuilt in stone in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and town may have been razed in 1459 by victorious Yorkist forces.

At the time of the Civil War, in the 1640s, Wem had become a relatively prosperous market town, a fact reflected by the foundation of institutions such as a Grammar School and almshouses. The town lay at a crossing of the River Roden on the strategically important route between Shrewsbury and Whitchurch.

At the outbreak of war in 1642 the town, undeclared and unfortified, was twice occupied by Royalist forces (Hannaford 2001). In 1643, after Bristol had been captured, the town was seized and became a Parliamentary garrison, the first in the Royalist stronghold of Shropshire. The defences are described as comprising of four gates at strategic points on the roads entering Wem, a four yard wide ditch circuit complete with corner towers, rampart and palisade (Hannaford 2001). These were constructed effectively enough to resist three sieges or attacks in 1643, 1644 and 1645. The building of these defences also called for a 'scorched earth' policy with those buildings, trees and fences outside the garrison that might offer cover for the enemy being razed to the ground.

The description of the defences comes from the Rev. Garbet in a local history of 1818 who starts from the Drayton Gate, somewhere on Aston Street, which was described as being wooden without hinges and goes on to outline the route of the ditch and rampart across the site, which may have survived as a low earthwork at this time (Hannaford, 2001). Garbet's description of the position of the defences across the site has been used to depict the line of the defensive ramparts on OS maps since 1881 (Fig. 5) and as the starting point in the archaeological investigation of the defences, a possible section of which survived as an earthwork south of the site on a east-west alignment until recently.

After the destruction inflicted by the Civil War and a 'Great Fire' in 1677 that destroyed most of the town, Wem went through a period of economic revival in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, before its decline as a market centre in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The historic maps suggest that the site retained a rural aspect until after the rail line was completed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. John Wood's plan of 1834 illustrates that the site was set within enclosed fields. By the time of the 1881 OS map (Fig. 5) a timber mill had been constructed in the northern part of the site. This map also shows the postulated line of the Civil War defences, based largely on Garbet's description.

### **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

The projected line of the Civil War defences has been examined four times prior to the current evaluation. In three of the four investigations no evidence of the defences was located (Watson 1989, Gifford and Partners 1992 and Hannaford 2001). The 2001 evaluation trenches were positioned in order to locate the defences on a projected line across the site (Fig. 2) that was depicted on the 1881 OS map, which was informed by a description provided by Garbet in 1818 (Hannaford 2001).

The only known excavation to have possibly located the defences was in 1998 (Marches Archaeology 1998). This revealed an east-west aligned ditch (Figs. 3 & 6), 8.7m x 1.4m, on an alignment south of the site. The east-west aligned ditch had also been marked on the 1881 OS map and was still a visible earthwork in the 1970s. The ditch had a 'noticeable change in profile roughly half way down each side from a 15 degree to a much steeper 30 degree

gradient. The base of the ditch' appeared 'to be flat but most of it had been lost to a later trench cut' (Marches Archaeology 1998). The ditch contained numerous fills that produced post-medieval pottery, but no pottery earlier than the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. No evidence for a rampart was located.

#### **4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The principle aim of the evaluation was to provide information that would enable an informed and reasonable planning decision to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the area affected by the proposed development.

The objectives were to:

- to locate archaeological features and deposits within the area,
- to assess the survival, quality, condition and relative significance of any archaeological features, deposits and structures within the site,
- to identify and recommend options for the management of the archaeological resource, including any further archaeological provision where necessary.

#### **5.0 METHODOLOGY**

##### **5.1 Fieldwork**

The site covers approximately 2.5 hectares. Three trenches were excavated across the site totalling 180m<sup>2</sup>. The trenches were located to investigate the line of Civil War defences. A previous attempt to locate the defences on their assumed alignment had failed to find any evidence of their existence within the site.

All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a JCB mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the top of the uppermost archaeological horizon or the natural subsoil. Subsequent cleaning and excavation was by hand.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50, and sections were drawn through all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:10. 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 monochrome, colour slide and digital photography.

Twenty litre soil samples were taken from datable archaeological features for the recovery of charred plant remains. The environmental sampling policy followed the guidelines contained in the Birmingham Archaeology Guide to On-Site Environmental Sampling. Recovered finds were cleaned; marked and remedial conservation work was undertaken as necessary. Treatment of all finds conformed to guidance contained within 'A strategy for the care and investigation of finds' published by English Heritage.

The full site archive includes all artefactual and/or ecofactual remains recovered from the site. 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). Finds and the paper archive will be deposited with an appropriate repository subject to permission from the landowner.

## **6.0 RESULTS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The following section contains only a brief summary of the results. Detailed information of the contexts recorded in individual trenches are presented in Appendix 1 and full details are available in the project archive.

### **6.2 Subsoil (natural)**

The natural orange sand subsoil (1002, 2008 and 3004) was reached at a height of 78.53m-79.42m AOD. The natural subsoil was disturbed by tree boles in Trenches 1 and 2.

### **6.3 Summary of archaeological features and deposits.**

**Trench 1:** 30m x 2m aligned E-W

The natural subsoil (1002) was cut by a WNW-ESE orientated curvilinear ditch (1006 and 1008, Plate 1), 0.98m wide and 0.56m deep, which terminated to the east. Two sections were excavated to investigate this feature. The ditch contained a fill (1005) which produced a sherd of post-medieval pottery. Ditch fill 1005 was cut by a shallow posthole or pit (1010) which contained no finds.

**Trench 2:** 30m x 2m aligned E-W (Fig. 4)

Several features cut the natural subsoil (Plate 2). At the west end of the trench was a wide northwest-southeast aligned ditch (2005) with a gently sloping west side and a flat base. Ditch 2005 extended beyond the west end of the trench and was at least 5.14m wide and 1.10m deep. A shallow possible posthole or small pit (2007), filled with a mid brown silty sand (2006), was cut into the base of the ditch. The primary fill of ditch 2005 was a sandy clay (2017) sealed by a secondary fill (2004) which contained a few small fragments of brick.

To the east of ditch 2005 was another ditch (2013, Plate 7) on a broadly similar alignment with steep sides and a flat base. Ditch 2013 was 3.30m wide and 1.2m deep with a primary fill (2012) of white sand containing bands of gravel. Overlying fill 2012 was the remains of a charred wooden plank (2016, Plate 8). Both 2012 and 2016 were sealed by a dark brown fill (2015) that contained sherds of post-medieval pottery. The eastern side of ditch 2005 and the western side of ditch 2013 were cut by another similarly aligned ditch (2003) with a bowl-shaped profile (Plate 6). The fill (2002) of ditch 2003 contained large amounts of 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery. A modern vertical-sided trench (2010) cut ditches 2013 and 2003.

Located further to the east was a large irregular post-pit (2029) containing two fills (2014 and 2028). Fill 2014 contained a large amount of damp wood fragments, presumably the remains of the post. Fill 2028 contained sherds of post-medieval pottery. Two further pits (2019 and 2021), containing 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century pottery (not retained), and an undated possible posthole (2027) were located further east.

**Trench 3:** 30m x 2m aligned SE-NW

No archaeological features or deposits were observed in this trench (Plate 3).

**6.4 Overburden and topsoil**

In Trench 1 the natural subsoil (1002) was sealed by a layer of mid grey-brown silty clay-sand (1001), 0.40m deep, which was overlain by a grey brown silty clay sand topsoil (1000) 0.30m - 0.40m deep.

The natural subsoil (2008) in Trench 2 was sealed by a layer of tarmac (2014), 0.10m deep, which was overlain by a layer of crushed grey stone (2001), 0.25m deep. Layer 2001 was sealed by a dark brown silty sandy clay topsoil (2000), 0.10m deep.

In Trench 3 the natural subsoil (3004) was sealed by a layer of black clinker and coal (3002), 0.25m deep. This was overlain by a layer of crushed stone (3001), 0.25m deep, sealed by a dark brown silty sandy clay topsoil (3000), 0.10m deep.

**7.0 THE FINDS**

**7.1 The pottery** (identifications by S. Rátkai)

**Context 1005, ditch 1006**

1 x brown glazed sherd 18<sup>th</sup> c

**Context 2002, ditch 2003**

1 x stoneware bottle – later 19<sup>th</sup> c  
1 x agate ware bowl base – 18<sup>th</sup> c  
2 x (joining) modern yellow ware bowl sherds - ?early 19<sup>th</sup> c  
2 x (joining) green transfer-printed teacup sherds - second half 19<sup>th</sup> c  
1 x industrial slipware jug/jar base - 19<sup>th</sup> c  
1 x ?industrial slipware jug base – 19<sup>th</sup> c  
1 x coarseware pancheon rim – 19<sup>th</sup> c  
10 x blue transfer-printed sherds from various vessels – 19<sup>th</sup> c

**Context 2015, ditch 2013**

2 x (joining) slip-coated ware sherds – late 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> c

**Context 2028, post-pit 2029**

2028  
2 x creamware sherds 1760s-1770s

**8.0 DISCUSSION**

The size of the wide parallel ditches 2005 and 2013, which may be contemporary, suggests they could have a defensive function. No dating evidence was recovered from the primary fill of these ditches. However, pottery from the final fill of ditch 2013 suggests a terminus ante

quem of late 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century for the primary fill of the ditch, which is consistent with the ditches being constructed during the Civil War period. The charred plank recorded in the fill of ditch 2013 could be remains of footboards or other wooden structures utilized as part of a rampart or other defensive feature, although no clear evidence of a rampart was visible. Evidence of a further phase of activity is suggested by the recutting of a single ditch on the same alignment as the double ditches. The lack of artefacts from the earliest fills of ditches could be suggestive of the rapid backfilling which could have occurred after the Civil War.

Due to truncation and the limited extent of the evaluation trenching only a partial understanding of the probable defence ditches in Trench 2 is possible. It is also not known whether the evidence represents part of a more sophisticated defence system that may have included bastions and redoubts or whether the line of defences deviated from a predictable linear path across the site. The evidence used to predict the line of the defensive circuit depicted on OS maps appears to have been largely based upon the observations of Rev. Garbet in 1818, observations that the 2007 and 2001 evaluations have proved were either wrong or misinterpreted. However, the defences must have been substantial and effective enough to survive several attacks or sieges during the course of the war.

The excavation on the projected line of the defences to the south of site (Marches Archaeology 1998, Fig. 6) revealed evidence that differed from that recorded during this evaluation. Here the probable Civil War defences consisted of a single ditch 8.7m wide and 1.4m deep. The profile of the ditch was different, although the section through the ditch obtained during the current evaluation was probably oblique. The finds from the ditch fill were mostly of 18<sup>th</sup> century date. It is possible that by reusing a field boundary ditch the nature and extent of the defences in this area may have differed from the rest of the defensive circuit and the relative abundance of finds and plethora of contexts within the ditch may be explained by a reinstatement of its use as a field boundary, but does not explain why no evidence for a rampart was located.

Due to the paucity of evidence of other small town Civil War defences, it is not possible to attempt a wider comparison of the scale of defences and construction techniques employed. However, it is clear that construction of defences was reliant on the expertise, time, materials, workers and money available. Although there was significant interest in the wars in Europe there was peace in England from 1588-1640, meaning that the science of defence often had to be learned from afresh. Whether the archaeology of a small town like Wem reflects this amateur start to the war is an interesting question. Clearly if these ditches are a part of the fortifications at Wem then it is interesting for a number of reasons, including alignment, layout and form (pers. comm. Martin Brown, Environmental Advisor (Archaeology), Ministry of Defence).

The use of gunpowder in warfare in Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> century caused a radical rethink in defence strategy. The endless wars on the continent in that century and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century saw considerable advances in the techniques of urban defence and where 'many of the military engineers of the English Civil War gained their experience' (Atkin and Laughlin 1992, 53).

Few remains of town defences have survived. As Peter Harrington states, 'In the vast majority of cases the fortifications were built of earth, which clearly could not stand the test of time nor survive later urban encroachment ... when peace came they still presented a hindrance and were quickly demolished' (Harrington 1992, 27). At Bridgnorth, Shropshire we hear of John Lawrence who in August 1642 was ordered to "procure mattocks, spades and other tools to make fortifications". In February 1645 the same gentleman was commanded to go into the neighbourhoods to get workmen to "worke at the fortifications of this Towne". Finally in

February 1647 Lawrence was once again called upon, this time to “obtain labourers to demolish and pull down the castle walls” (Harrington, 2003, 44). The temporary nature of the defences also causes problems of identification and interpretation for archaeologists since there usually has not been enough time for a build up of datable discarded artefacts. Therefore many ditches will often have just a single sterile context.

The Civil War defences that have been studied have usually been associated with cities such as London, Gloucester, Exeter and Plymouth, or those belonging to castles or large fortified houses such as Basing. Those that were monumental in size and sophisticated in construction, such as the Queen’s Sconce at Newark have also been examined. Small market town defences, such as at Wem, have rarely been encountered or investigated. Many of these small towns, although minor in status now, were strategically important in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Comparative studies are also very difficult because, as Harrington states, the ‘...Civil Wars were marked by compromise and ad hoc arrangements when it came to fortifications, in contrast to the Continent where more permanent masonry structures were built. Due to the nature of the war, defences were constructed in haste and there never was enough money or manpower for construction or upkeep. Cost cutting measures were introduced and, inevitably, corners were cut. What resulted did not always conform to the standard practices of the time’ (Harrington 2003, 6).

Harrington also outlines a generalized fortification construction method used in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It involved ‘marking out the sites using pegs and string, earth moving on a large scale, mounding up soil and mud into a variety of structures, excavating ditches and trenches, cutting planking, sharpening poles into palisades and storm poles and making wicker baskets and filling them with earth... Turf was very important as a means of binding the earth together and limiting erosion and there are many accounts of grass sods being cut for placing on the earthworks’ (Harrington 2003, 17).

Since there is no evidence on the earliest relevant map of the site (Wood’s 1834 plan of Wem) of a feature corresponding to the ditch containing 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery, possibly a field boundary, located in Trench 1, it may be associated with a boundary that may pre-dates 18<sup>th</sup> century enclosures. If it was in existence prior to the Civil War period and lay within the defence line it may have been destroyed at that time in order to aid free movement close to the fortifications.

## **9.0 IMPLICATIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS**

As only a narrow section across the potential Civil War features was possible within the scope of the evaluation only a limited understanding of the nature, alignment and extent of the fortifications could be gained. It is therefore recommended that further archaeological work be carried out. The nature of this work is dependent on the extent of the area affected by the development and construction methods. From the evidence obtained during the evaluation a zone of possible archaeological sensitivity has been highlighted (Fig. 3). The area depicted shows the area where it is most likely that the Civil War defences exist. The overlaid development plan shows that access roads and residential buildings are proposed to be built within this zone. The foundation design for the buildings involves 600mm wide vibro stone columns set out on a grid basis at 2m centres over the footprint of the houses and garages. It is suggested that areas where topsoil/ overburden stripping will be carried out for roads and services should be subject to an archaeological watching brief. The foundations for the buildings will have some impact on the buried archaeological remains, which are 0.45m below

the present ground surface. Further archaeological excavation may be appropriate as mitigation for the impact of the proposed new buildings on the archaeological remains. This evaluation has provided information on which a decision regarding the necessity and extent of any further excavation and watching brief can be made. This will be determined by the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council.

## 10.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Morris Homes (West Midlands) Ltd. Thanks are due to Jason Berry and Andrew Mole for their co-operation and assistance throughout the project. Thanks also go to Mike Watson, Historic Environment Officer, who monitored the project on behalf of Shropshire County Council. Work on site was supervised by Mark Charles and assisted by Bob Burrows, and Christina Jolliffe. Thanks are due to Stephanie Rátkai who identified the finds. Mark Charles produced the written report which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds and Bryony Ryder. Laurence Jones edited the report and also managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

## 11.0 CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

c.1834 John Wood's Plan of Wem

1881 Ordnance Survey map first edition, scale 1:2500

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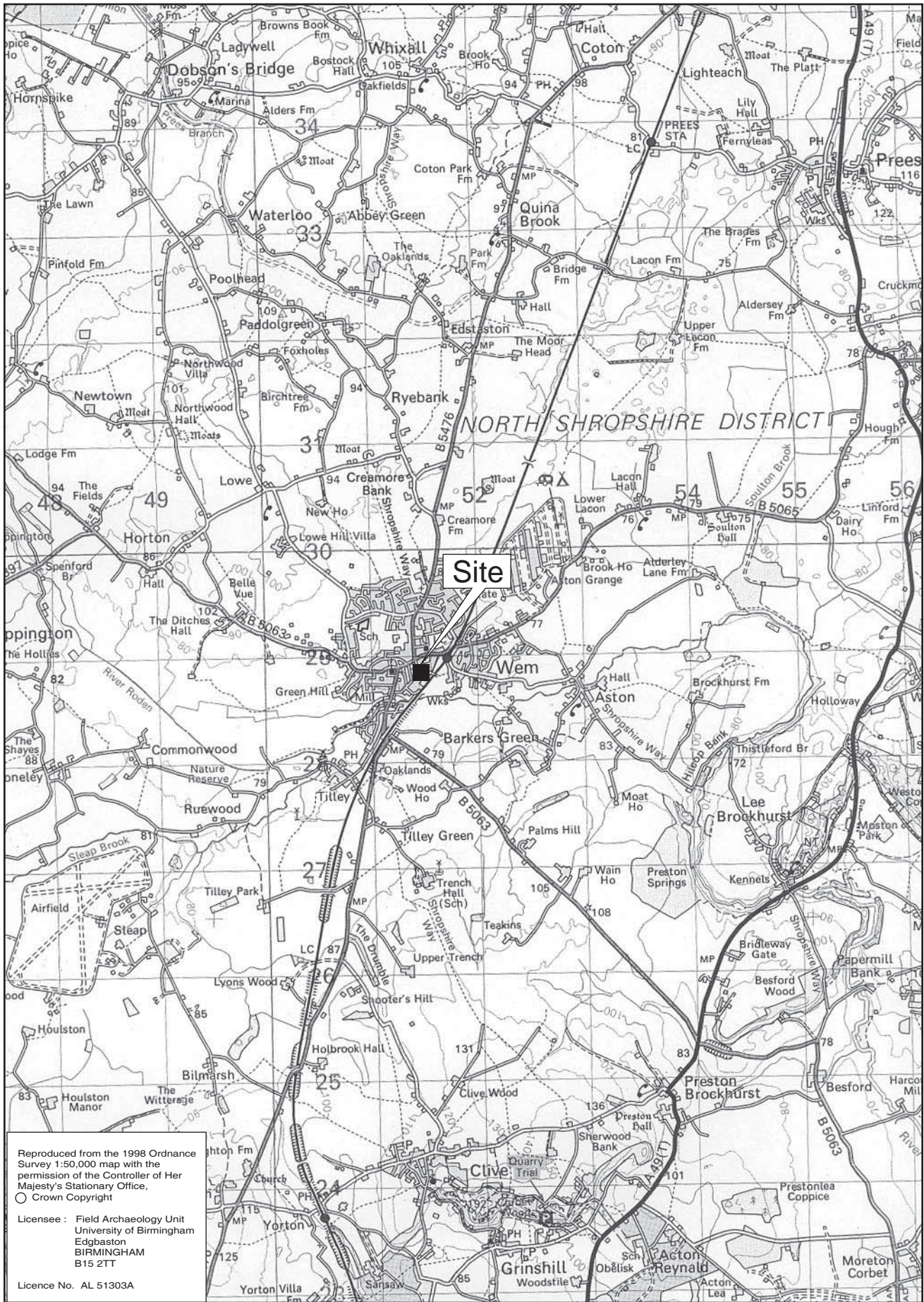


Fig.1

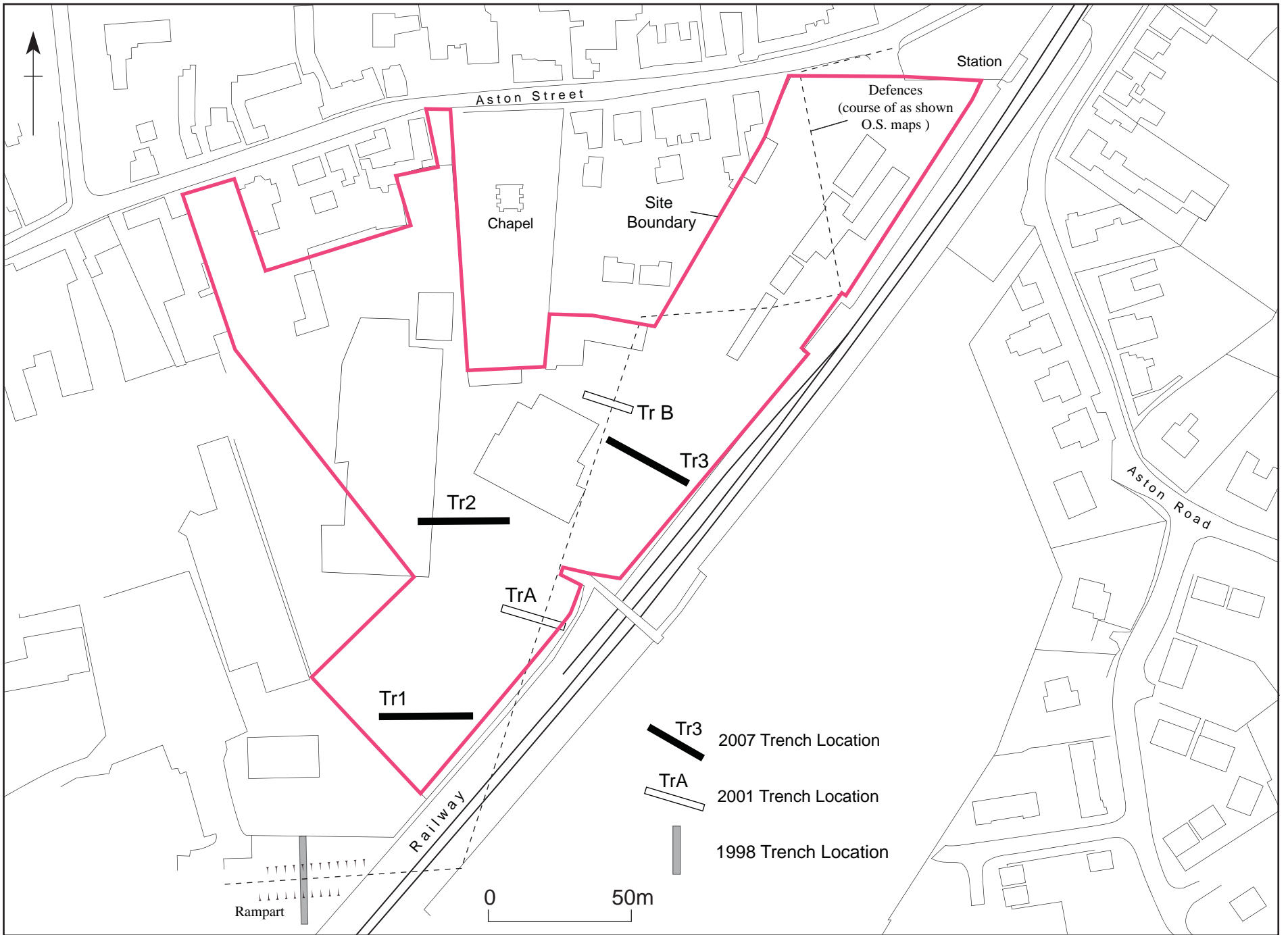


Fig.2





Fig.3

# Trench 2

Section of 2003,2005 and 2013 (reversed)

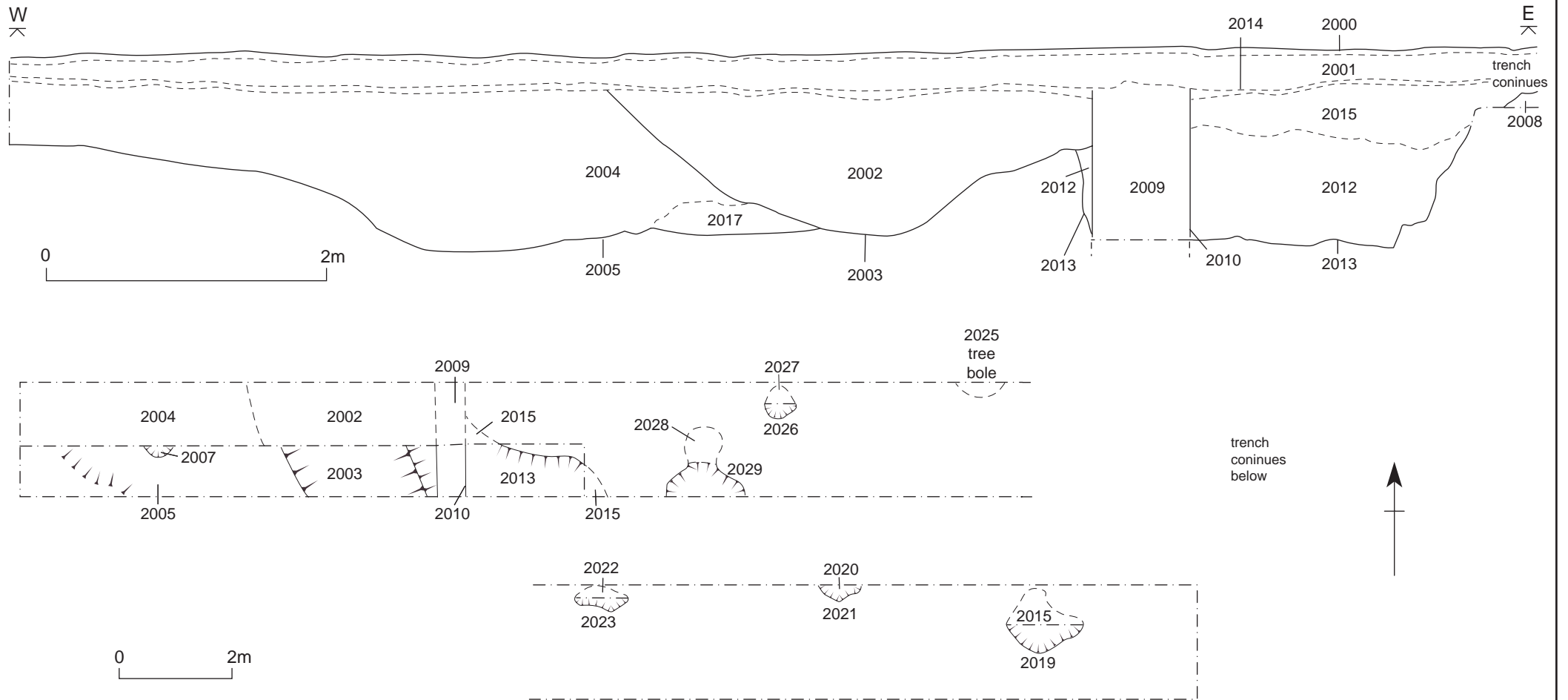


Fig.4

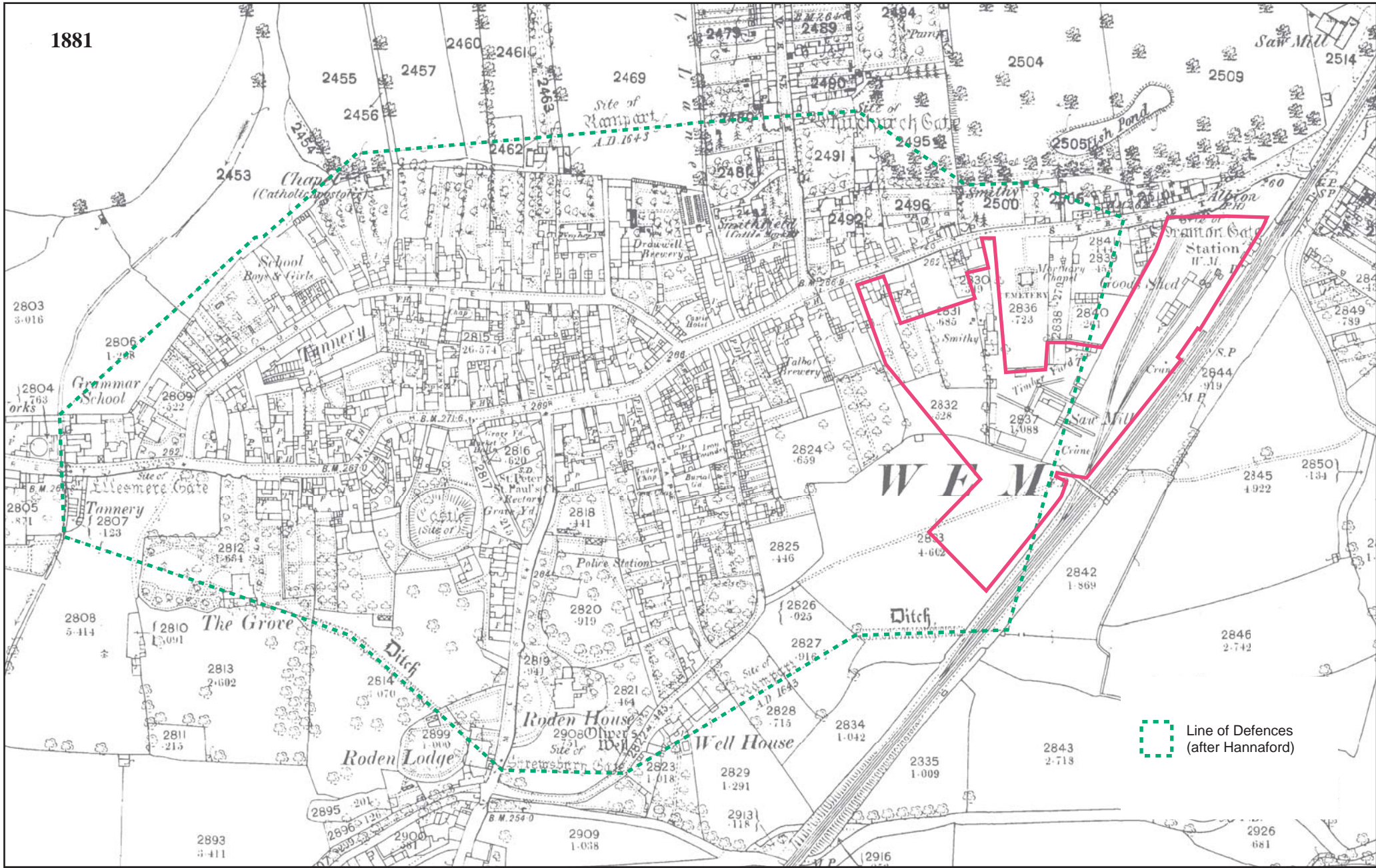


Fig.5

Section Through Possible Civil War Defence Ditch: Marches Archaeology 1998

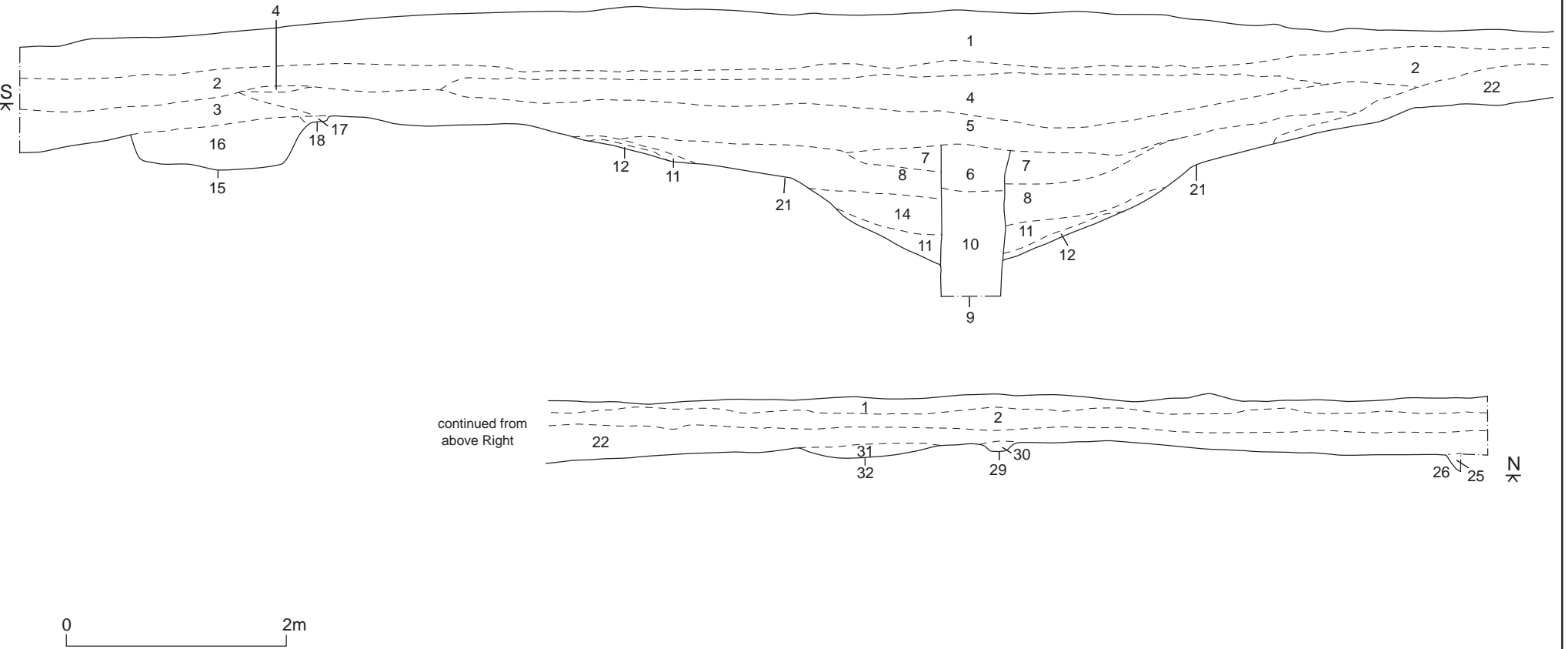


Fig.6



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8

## APPENDIX 1: detailed feature and context descriptions

Heights are the present ground level taken from the centre of each trench and shown in metres AOD.

**Trench 1:** 30m in length x 2m in width.

Trench stratigraphy: Natural orange sand 1002 was revealed at between 0.55m below modern ground level (80.18 AOD) at the west of the trench and 0.80m (79.88 AOD) to the east. This was sealed by up to 0.40m of mid grey-brown silty clay sand (1001), which, in turn, was overlain by 0.30-0.40m of topsoil (1000).

| Feature no | Description   | Max dimensions (m) |       |
|------------|---|--------------------|-------|
|            |   | Width              | Depth |
| 1003       | Tree bole contained light brown silty sand (1004) and small stones. Irregularly shaped                          | 1.20               | 0.32  |
| 1006       | Curvilinear ditch aligned WNW-ESE. Filled by dark brown silty clay sand (1005). Finds of post-medieval pottery. | 0.98               | 0.56  |
| 1008       | Fill of terminal end of ditch 1006. No finds.   | 0.90               | 0.38  |
| 1010       | Posthole/ pit. Cut into context 1005, ditch 1006. Filled with mid brown silty sand (1009).                      | 0.30               | 0.10  |

**Trench 2:** 30m in length x 2m in width.

Trench stratigraphy: Natural orange sand 2008 was revealed at 0.50m below modern ground level (79.47 AOD) at the western end of the trench and at 0.45m to the east (78.94 AOD). This was sealed by a 0.10m of a layer of tarmac (2014), which in turn was overlain by up to 0.25m of a levelling layer of grey stone rubble (2001) that was sealed beneath a 0.10m layer of top soil (2000).

| Feature no | Description   | Max dimensions (m) |             |
|------------|---|--------------------|-------------|
|            |   | Width              | Depth       |
| 2003       | Ditch aligned NW-SE with U-shaped profile. Filled by dark brown silty sand (2002) and packed with 19 <sup>th</sup> C pottery. Cuts ditches 2005 and 2013 and cut by Trench 2010.  | 3.50               | 1.00        |
| 2005       | Ditch aligned NW-SE with moderate sloping side to west extends beyond Trench 2. Cut by 2003 to the east and by a post hole or pit (2007). Filled by a mostly sterile mid brown silty sand (2004) with a small brick fragment. | 5.14 (min.)        | 1.10        |
| 2007       | Circular posthole or small pit. Filled by mid brown silty sand (2006). Cuts fill (2004) of ditch 2005.  | 0.40               | 0.04        |
| 2010       | Vertical- sided trench cut through both ditches 2013 and 2003. Filled by mid brown silty sand with inclusions of stone rubble. The trench appeared to cut tarmac layer 2014 and was overlain by stone levelling layer 2001.   | 0.70               | 0.95 (min.) |
| 2013       | Ditch aligned NW-SE with steep sides and a flat base. Primary fill of white sand and gravel (2012). The remains of a wooden plank (2016) lay directly over 2012. These two contexts were                                      | 3.30               | 1.20        |



|      |   |      |      |
|------|---|------|------|
|      | sealed by a layer of dark brown silty sandy clay (2015) that produced post-medieval pottery. The ditch was cut by both Trench 2010 and ditch 2003.                                  |      |      |
| 2016 | Fill of 2013 charred wood lying directly over 2012.   | 0.30 | 0.04 |
| 2017 | Layer. Linear narrow layer of yellow grey sandy clay. Cut by 2003 and overlain by. Possible association with 2005.  |      |      |
| 2019 | Pit. Filled by dark brown silty sand (2018). Finds of post-medieval brick and metal.  | 0.90 | 0.50 |
| 2021 | Pit. Filled by a dark brown silty sandy gravel (2020). Only partial excavation.   | 0.25 | 0.20 |
| 2023 | Tree bole contains light brown sandy gravel (2022).   | 0.60 | 0.18 |
| 2025 | Tree bole contains mid brown gravel and sand (2024).  | 0.70 | 0.10 |
| 2027 | Circular pit/post hole. Fill of mid brown sandy gravel (2026).  | 0.40 | 0.10 |
| 2029 | Post-pit vertical sided flat base filled by a dark brown silty sand with wood inclusions (2030) and a mid to dark brown gravelly silty sand (2028). Finds of post-medieval pottery. | 1.38 | 0.88 |

**Trench 3:** 30m in length x 2m in width.

Natural orange sand (3004) was encountered at 0.55m beneath modern ground level (79.16 AOD) at the western end of the trench and also to the east (79.35 AOD). This was sealed by 0.25m black layer of powdered coal and clinker (3002), which was overlain by 0.25m layer of grey track stone (3001) and then sealed by a 0.10m dark brown silty sandy clay top soil layer (3000).

No features were encountered in Trench 3 which seems to have been used as a dumping ground for railway associated waste. A deposit, 0.25m deep, of re-deposited grey sand was observed and tested but was found to have been a residue from layer 3002 above.

## APPENDIX 2

# BRIEF FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION AT ASTON STREET, WEM, SHROPSHIRE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 There is a proposal to erect a housing development on land off Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire (NGR SJ515285). The proposed development site occupies a former timber yard which currently comprises a series of disused industrial buildings and large areas of open space and yards.
- 1.2 The proposed development site is crossed by the postulated line of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Civil War defences of Wem. The site may therefore contain important archaeological remains relating to this monument.
- 1.3 In view of the potential archaeological significance of the proposed development site it has been deemed necessary to carry out a field evaluation of it in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the DoE planning Policy Guidance No 16 (No 1990).
- 1.4 This brief is intended to form the basis for a written scheme of investigation for the archaeological field evaluation. The study area is shown on the accompany site plan.

## 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The aim of the evaluation is to provide information that will enable an informed and reasonable planning decision to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the area affected by the proposed development.
- 2.2 The objectives will be:
  - (a) To locate any archaeological features and deposits within the study area.
  - (b) To assess the survival, quality, condition and relative significance of any archaeological features, deposits and structures within the study area.
  - (c) To identify and recommend option for the management of the archaeological resource, including any further archaeological provision where necessary.

## 3. PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

- 3.1 An archaeological evaluation of the proposed development site was carried out in 2001 (An Archaeological Evaluation of Land off Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire, H R Hannaford, Shropshire County Council, Report No 194, 2001). The trial trench failed to locate any traces of the Civil War defences along their traditionally presumed course. It was concluded however, that they probably do run elsewhere through the site.

#### 4. REQUIREMENTS

- 4.1 In order to achieve the objectives outlined in paragraph 2.2 (above) the field evaluation shall comprise the archaeological excavation of three sample areas each measuring 30 metres long x 2 metres wide. The provisional locations of the sample areas are shown on the accompanying plan.
- 4.2 All excavation shall be limited to the top of significant archaeological deposits. Further full or partial excavation of deposits shall be undertaken only where essential for achieving the objectives of the evaluation exercise.
- 4.3 A full graphic, photographic and written record of the findings even if negative will be made. Individual contexts will be recorded on separate contexts sheets within a context register. Plans shall be drawn to a 1:50 or 1:20 scale and section drawings to a scale of 1:20 or 1:10 as appropriate. Elevation drawings of all structures remains shall be at a scale of 1:20. Drawn records will be related to Ordnance Survey datum and published boundaries were appropriate. Photographic records will be at a minimum 35mm format and include both black and white and colour.
- 4.4 All archaeological objects, artefacts, industrial waste and faunal remains will be recovered and related to the contexts from which they derive wherever possible. They will be exposed, lifted, cleaned, conserved, marked, bagged and boxed in accordance with the guidelines set out in the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation's Conservation Guidelines No 2.
- 4.5 Provision shall also be made for the sampling of deposits for environmental and technological evidence where appropriate. Any environmental samples taken shall be bulk samples of a minimum of 10 litres. They shall be taken only from contexts considered to be of a high potential and used as a basis for assessing potential further analysis.
- 4.6 In the event of human remains being encountered, all relevant statutory and Home Office requirements shall be fully complied with.
- 4.7 All archaeological trenches will be backfilled upon completion (for safety reasons and to protect exposed archaeological deposits), unless the client gives written instructions to the contrary.
- 4.8 Documentary research shall be undertaken where appropriate to assist with the assessment and interpretation of the on-site investigation.

#### 5. ARCHIVE AND REPORT

- 5.1 This site archive will be prepared to at least the minimum acceptable standard defined in English Heritage's Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP 2). This will include all written, drawn and photographic records relating directly to the investigation undertaken. It will be quantified, ordered, indexed and internally consistent before the transfer to the recipient body. It will also contain where relevant site matrix a site summary and brief written observations on the artefactual and environmental data (where appropriate).

- 5.2 To ensure compatibility with other archaeological archives produced in the County all archaeological strata and features excavated or exposed will be entered onto prepared pro forma recording sheets and recorded with a context register.
- 5.3 The site archive, including finds and environmental material, will be ordered, catalogued, labelled and conserved and stored according to the UKIC Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long term storage.
- 5.4 The project archive will be presented to an appropriate museum or recipient body within 12 months of completion of the fieldwork, subject to the agreement of the site owner with regards to any finds.
- 5.5 Prior to the commencement of the project the Contractor shall contact the Curator of Archaeology, Museum Services, Shropshire County Council, who will advise on an appropriate repository for the project archive and the provision for any finds. Responsibility for obtaining the owner(s) permission for deposition of finds shall lie with the contractor.
- 5.6 Contractors are responsible for arranging the deposition of finds, including obtaining the owner(s) permission, and ascertaining the costs of storage and deposition with an approved body before the project commences and informing the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council of the arrangements which have been made.
- 5.7 If the finds are not to be donated to the appropriate recipient body, arrangements shall be made for a comprehensive record of all materials (including detailed drawings, photographs and descriptions of individual finds), which can instead constitute the archaeological archive.
- 5.8 The result of the project will be submitted in an illustrated and bound report, which enable:
  - a) Written assessments of the specified objectives outlined in paragraphs 3.2.
  - b) A full written description and interpretation of the results of all elements of the project.
  - c) A narrative and interpretative account of all historic landscape and structural evidence.
  - d) It will be fully illustrated with drawings and plans to an appropriate scale.
  - e) All documentary research/historical analysis shall be supported by copies of relevant historic maps, documents and aerial photographs. All sources consulted shall be cited.
- 5.9 In addition to copies submitted to the client, a copy of the project report shall be provided to the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council, and one copy to the Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record.

- 5.10 Shropshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record is currently participating in the OASIS (Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigation Scheme). As part of the scheme the contractor is required to fill in an OASIS data capture form on completion of each report stage of an archaeological project, and on deposition of the final archive. Details of the progress, copies of the form and guidelines for its completion can be found on the internet at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis>. Failing this, contact either the Shropshire SMR or Archaeological Data Service directly for further advice.

## 6. MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

- 6.1 Curatorial responsibility for this project lies with the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council.
- 6.2 In response to the project brief, Contractors are expected to submit for prior written approval a written scheme of investigation to the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council, detailing their intended scheme of work, proposed working methods, report format and content, timescales and staffing levels (including any specialist sub-contractors). Levels of professional competence in appropriate areas shall be demonstrated. No archaeological work should commence until the written scheme of investigation has been approved in writing by the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council.
- 6.3 Information provided in this brief cannot fully anticipate the conditions that will be encountered as work progresses. If requirements of the brief cannot be fully met they should only be excluded or altered after attainment of the written approval of the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council.
- 6.4 The project will be monitored throughout by the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council. To facilitate this, the archaeological contractor shall advise the Historic Environmental Officer in writing at least one week in advance of commencement of the on-site work.

## 7. CONDITIONS

- 7.1 All archaeological work is to be carried out under the direct supervision of an appropriately qualified and experienced archaeologist.
- 7.2 The code of conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists will be adhered to.
- 7.3 The Archaeological Contractor is to ensure requirements relating to all relevant health and safety legislations and codes of practice will be adhered to.

## APPENDIX 3

**Land off Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire**

**THE UNIVERSITY  
OF BIRMINGHAM**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION:  
WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION**



**Planning application reference no.**  
N/05/640/WU/33

**Developer: Morris Homes (West Midlands)  
Limited**

**Birmingham  
Archaeology**

**Archaeological Contractor: Birmingham  
Archaeology**



## **PART A (SITE SPECIFIC)**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

This document describes the programme of work required to undertake an archaeological investigation at the above site. It forms the written scheme of investigation for the work, which is a requirement of the brief prepared by Shropshire County Council (SCC 2006). Any variation in the scope of work would be agreed with the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council before implementation

A planning application (Planning application reference no. N/05/640/WU/33) has been submitted to Shropshire County Council for outline permission for the proposed residential development of land off Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire. As the proposed development site is of possible archaeological significance an archaeological evaluation was recommended by the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council as a condition of planning consent. This is in accordance with government advice contained with PPG 16 (DoE 1990).

### **2 SITE DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION**

The site is located off Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire, and is centred on NGR SJ 515 285 (hereafter referred to as the site). The underlying drift geology consists of river terrace deposits of sand and gravel. The present character of the site is a disused timber yard, disused coal yard, associated buildings and hard standing.

### **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Detailed historical background information can be found in an assessment carried out by Hereford and Worcester County Archaeological Service (Buteux 1996) and much of this section is a summary of information contained in this assessment report and a previous evaluation report (Hannaford 2001).

Wem was probably founded in the Anglo- Saxon period, and the town's name may refer to the marsh adjacent to the River Roden which flows through the town. Wem was mentioned in the Domesday Survey and was held by William Pandulf for Earl Roger of Montgomery, at this time. Wem was the centre of a Barony which comprised of 29 manors. A motte and bailey castle was built by Hugh Pandulf in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1205 a grant from King John permitted a market to be held in Wem. The town suffered during the Wars of the Roses and the castle, which may have been rebuilt in stone in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and town may have been razed in 1459 by victorious Yorkist forces.

During the Civil War, in 1643, the town was occupied by parliamentary forces who fortified the town with a rampart and ditch. The town was successfully defended against the Royalist forces. The course of the Civil War fortifications was outlined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Garbet's History of Wem and is depicted on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map and later editions. A stretch of the defences is still visible to the southwest of the site. In 1677, a great fire swept through Wem, burning down many of the timber buildings in the centre of the town. This would have required a substantial programme of rebuilding. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the site appears to have been of agricultural land. The Shrewsbury to Crewe railway and Wem railway station were constructed in the 1850s and a sawmill, goods yard, lumberyard, railway sidings, and a smithy occupied the site by the 1880s.

The postulated line of the Civil War defences, as depicted on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1881, crosses the site. A previous evaluation carried out on the site by Shropshire County Council Archaeology Service (Hannaford 2001) did not reveal any evidence of the defences, or any significant archaeological features, but did suggest the line of the defences shown on the 1881 map may be incorrect. Previous evaluation (Gifford and Partners 1992) on the line of the defences at the northern part of town also failed locate the defences, and it appeared that the course of the defences depicted on OS maps was also not accurate at this location.

## 4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of the evaluation is to give information which will allow a reliable informed planning decision to be made regarding any further archaeological requirements for the site. The specific objectives of the evaluation are:

- I. to locate any archaeological features and deposits within the site,
- II. to assess the survival, quality, condition and relative archaeological significance of any archaeological features, deposits and structures within the site,
- III. to identify and recommend options for the management of the archaeological resource, including any further archaeological provision where necessary.

## PART B (GENERIC)

## 5 METHODOLOGY

The proposed development area covers approximately 2.5 hectares. A total of three trenches (each 30m x 2m) will be excavated across the site totalling 180m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1). Trenches will be located in positions, indicated by the brief, to target areas not investigated in the 2001 evaluation, close to the postulated line of the Civil War defences where archaeological evidence of the ditch and rampart may be present. Trial-trenches will be surveyed-in using an EDM total station or other appropriate survey instruments.

All topsoil and modern overburden will be removed using a JCB type mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the top of the uppermost archaeological horizon or the subsoil. Subsequent cleaning and excavation will be by hand. A representative sample of archaeological features and deposits will be manually sample excavated sufficiently to define their character and to obtain suitable dating evidence. Generally, 50% of pits or postholes and a 1m section of linear/ curvi-linear features will be excavated. Archaeological deposits will not be completely excavated unless this is unavoidable. The depth of archaeological deposits across the site will be assessed, although the full length of every trench will not necessarily be excavated down to natural.

All stratigraphic sequences will be recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features will be planned at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50, and sections will be drawn of all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:10. A comprehensive written record will be maintained using a continuous numbered context system on *pro-forma* context cards. Written

records and scale plans will be supplemented by photographs using monochrome and colour print and colour slide photography.

Twenty litre soil samples will be taken from suitable datable archaeological features for the recovery of charred plant remains. The environmental sampling policy followed the guidelines contained in the Birmingham Archaeology Guide to On-Site Environmental Sampling and the *Report of the Association for Environmental Archaeology Working Party on Sampling and Recovery*, September 1995. Recovered finds will be cleaned, marked and remedial conservation work will be undertaken as necessary. Treatment of all finds will conform to guidance contained within 'A strategy for the care and investigation of finds' published by English Heritage.

The full site archive will include all artefactual and/or ecofactual remains recovered from the site. The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeological 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). Finds and the paper archive will be deposited with an appropriate repository within 12 months of the completion of the fieldwork, subject to permission from the landowner. Before the evaluation begins the Curator of Archaeology, Museum Services, Shropshire County Council will be contacted for advice on archive deposition.

## 6.0 STAFFING

The project will be managed and directed for Birmingham Archaeology by Laurence Jones Cert He (B. Archaeol) MIFA. The evaluation will be supervised in the field by Mark Charles BA Hons, MA, an experienced archaeologist, assisted by a team of two experienced site assistants.

Specialist staff will be, where appropriate:

Dr Lawrence Barfield- Flint artefacts, freelance consultant lithics specialist.

Ian Baxter- Animal bone, freelance consultant archaeozoologist.

Dr Megan Brickley- Human Bone, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham

Jane Cowgill- slag and industrial residues, freelance consultant.

Dr Jeremy Evans- Roman pottery, Honorary Research Fellow, Birmingham Archaeology, University of Birmingham.

C. Jane Evans- Roman pottery, freelance consultant pottery specialist

Rowena Gale- Charcoal and wood, freelance consultant.

Dr. Ben Gearey- Palynology, Geoarchaeology, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham.

Dr Pam Grinter- Charred plant remains, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham.

Dr Andrew Howard- Archaeo-geomorphology, Lecturer in Archaeo-geomorphology and Remote Sensing, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham.

Erica Macey-Bracken- Small finds, Birmingham Archaeology, University of Birmingham

Stephanie Rátkai- Saxon, medieval and post-medieval pottery, Honorary Research Associate and Finds Researcher, University of Birmingham.

Dr David Smith- Micro-fauna, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham.

Dr Emma Tetlow- Palaeoentomology, Geoarchaeology, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham.

Dr Roger White- Coins and brooches, Project Manager, Lecturer and Assistant Director (Development), Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham.

Dr Ann Woodward- Prehistoric pottery, Research Fellow, Birmingham Archaeology, University of Birmingham.

## 7.0 REPORT

On completion of the fieldwork post-excavation work, including finds processing/ conservation, analysis and primary research, will be undertaken. A site archive will be compiled and an illustrated bound report will be prepared. This report will include:

- (a) Summary.
- (b) Description of the archaeological background.
- (c) Method.
- (d) A narrative description of the results and discussion of the evidence, set in the local, regional and national research context, supported by appropriate plans, sections, photographs and relevant historic maps.
- (e) Summary of the finds and environmental evidence.
- (f) Specialist assessments of the finds and environmental evidence.
- (g) Impact assessment and recommended mitigation strategy

The written report will be made publicly accessible, as part of the Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record within six months of completion. One copy of the report will be lodged with the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council and one copy will be deposited with the Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record. A digital copy on CD-ROM will be provided, as required. A summary report may be submitted for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology*. If the results are considered of regional or national importance it may be appropriate to publish the report in an archaeological journal.

## 8.0 TIMETABLE

At least one weeks notice of the start of fieldwork will be given to the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire County Council. Review/ monitoring meetings will be arranged during the fieldwork. It is expected the fieldwork will commence on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007 and it will be carried out over five days.

## 9.0 GENERAL

All project staff will adhere to the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. The project will follow the requirements set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994, revised 2001).

A detailed Risk Assessment will be prepared prior to the commencement of fieldwork. All current health and safety legislation, regulations and guidance will be complied with. The excavation will conform to the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992* and *Health & Safety in Field Archaeology Manual* (SCAUM 1991).

Any human remains encountered will be initially left in situ and covered. In the event that human remains need to be removed this will be carried out under the terms of a Home Office Licence and adhere to relevant environmental health regulations. All finds which may constitute 'treasure' under the Treasure Act, 1997 will be removed to a safe place and reported to the local Coroner. If removal is not possible on the same working day as discovery, appropriate security arrangements will be provided to keep the finds safe from theft.

## 10 REFERENCES

Buteux, V. 1996 Archaeological Assessment of Wem, Shropshire. Hereford and Worcester County Council, County Archaeological Service Report No. 351

Department of the Environment (DoE), 1990 Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning

English Heritage, 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

Gifford and Partners, 1992 *Archaeological Evaluation at Wem Business Park, Wem, Shropshire*

Hannaford, H. 2001 *An Archaeological Evaluation of Land off Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire*. Shropshire County Council, Archaeology Service Report

Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), 1994 Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations. Revised 2001

Museums and Galleries Commission, 1992 Standards in the museum care of archaeological collections. London: Museums and Galleries Commission

SCC (Shropshire County Council) 2006 *Brief for an Archaeological Field Evaluation at Aston Street, Wem, Shropshire*

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Walker, K. 1990 Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage. UKIC, London