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Snow Hill Queensway,
Birmingham

An Archaeological Excavation and
Watching Brief 2006

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An Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief 2006

By

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For

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SNOW HILL QUEENSWAY, BIRMINGHAM

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND WATCHING BRIEF, 2006

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SUMMARY

An archaeological excavation and watching brief at Snow Hill Queensway, Birmingham (centred on NGR. SP 069873) was commissioned by Ballymore Properties Ltd. The work was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in August 2006. The watching brief monitored the excavation of a service location trench through the earth bank and car park to the northeast of Snow Hill Station, and a trench was excavated within the bank area. The archaeological investigations aimed to identify any remains relating to Oppenheim's Glassworks, the earliest known glassworks in Birmingham, identified by a previous desk-based assessment as potentially surviving within this area.

The archaeological investigations established that the area had been substantially truncated by the construction of large foundation walls, floor surfaces, and service trenches, probably associated with the former Snow Hill Station, which had been demolished and replaced in the 1980s. Part of an earlier wall was identified that was possibly associated with the early glassworks, although as it was heavily truncated, and not associated with any other features or structures, little can be inferred from its presence within the site.

SNOW HILL QUEENSWAY, BIRMINGHAM

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND WATCHING BRIEF, 2006

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the project

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Ballymore Properties Ltd to undertake a programme of archaeological investigation ahead of a mixed development at Snow Hill Queensway, Birmingham (hereafter referred to as the site, Planning Application Number C/06465/01/OUT, Fig. 1).

This report outlines the results of an excavation and watching brief carried out August 2006, and has been prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation (IFA 2001).

A desk-based assessment was undertaken in 2001 (Conway 2001), which highlighted the possibility of the survival of archaeological remains associated with Birmingham's first known glassworks within the study area.

The excavation conformed to a brief produced by Birmingham City Council (Appendix 1), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2006) which was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to implementation. The work was undertaken in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16, DoE 1990), Policy 8.36 of the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan, and the Council's Archaeology Strategy, adopted as supplementary planning guidance.

1.2 Location and geology

The site is located on the southwest side of Snow Hill Queensway and adjoins Snow Hill Station and is centred on NGR SP 069873 (Figs. 1 and 2). The investigations were located towards the base of an earth bank which defines the northeastern side of the former station.

The underlying geology consists of sands and gravels.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Mayer Oppenheim's glassworks was established in 1757 at 94 Snow Hill (Conway 2001). Oppenheim had obtained a patent for the manufacture of red transparent glass in 1755. His glass-house and dwelling are mentioned in 1762, and the business is recorded in trade directories in 1767, 1770 and 1775, but not in 1777 at which date he was declared bankrupt. There is no indication of a glassworks on the site on Hanson's map of 1778.

The site is particularly important because it is the earliest known glassworks in Birmingham and precedes the city's canal-based glass industry, which began at the end of the 18th century. Number 94 Snow Hill was located on the southwest side of Snow Hill, in the area now largely occupied by Snow Hill Station. The earth bank between the edge of the former Snow Hill and the present station could have retained archaeological deposits, pertinent to the glassworks.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of the fieldwork was to ensure that archaeological remains of Oppenheim's Glassworks on the site were fully investigated and recorded in advance of the proposed development.

Specific aims were to address the following:

- The types of structures surviving, and their relationship to those at other Birmingham glassworks.
- The survival of industrial residues relating to fuels, raw materials and finished products.
- The potential of the site to contribute to an understanding of the historic development of this part of Birmingham.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Fieldwork (Fig. 2)

The fieldwork comprised a watching brief during the excavation of a service investigation trench (Trench 9) measuring 0.5m wide, and the excavation of a trench, measuring 2m x 25m, through the earth bank adjacent to the modern Snow Hill Station.

All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, working under direct archaeological supervision. During the watching brief the excavated depth was a maximum of 2m, which exposed the top of brick walls. The trench was excavated to the top of the uppermost archaeological horizon or the 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 1:50, and sections were drawn through all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:50. 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 colour print and digital 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 (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 Birmingham Museum subject to permission from the landowner.

5 RESULTS (FIG. 3)

The natural subsoil (1000) was reached at a depth of 1.1m–1.5m below the modern ground level at the base of the bank, and approximately 0.7m below the current car park level. It comprised layers of orange and yellow sand and gravel.

During the watching brief, Trench 9 was excavated to a maximum depth of 2m. In the area of the bank, the tops of two walls were encountered (later identified as 1011 and 1013), and

were left *in situ*. Where Trench 9 cut through the car park modern services and the remains of the concrete foundations of tram lines were identified.

Most of the area covered by the excavation trench was shown to have been truncated by modern development, probably associated with the previous Snow Hill Station buildings. Only one structure was identified that pre-dated this phase of construction.

Part of a wall (1013, Plate 1) was identified at the northwestern end of the trench, aligned northwest-southeast. This wall was of an earlier phase than the other structures identified, and may relate either to the earlier glasshouse, or to another building that pre-dated the former station. However, later truncation by a service trench (1005) running parallel to this wall had removed any relationship with other archaeological features, and the wall was also truncated by a manhole (1004), and the cut for a northeast-southwest aligned wall (1007, see below). The full width of this wall was ascertained during the watching brief as being 0.5m wide, although its depth was not. It was overlain by the compact silt and rubble overburden (1010) identified throughout the trench.

Plate 1. Wall 1013, truncated by manhole 1004 (left) and wall and cut 1006/1007 (right)

All other archaeological features and structures were of modern construction, and are likely to be associated with the former Snow Hill Station, although different building phases were identified.

The remains of substantial wall footings (1011/1012) were present in the southwest facing section. The construction cut for the wall footings was visible cutting the natural subsoil where a modern service trench had truncated the remains (1014). The foundations were exposed to a depth of eleven courses, and were stepped at the base. They were constructed in English bond, and used both purple engineering bricks, and orange bricks, possibly representing

rebuild or reuse. The remains of concrete foundation blocks and an iron reinforcement bar were also incorporated into the build of this wall.

Plate 2. Wall foundations 1012, and modern service cut 1003/1014

Plate 3. Wall foundations 1011 and 1006, and foundation cut 1007

At the northwestern end of the trench, foundation wall 1011 was bonded with a northeast-southwest aligned wall (1006), also constructed from purple engineering bricks. This wall was approximately 1m wide, and possibly represented the return of feature 1011. The cut for this wall (1007) truncated wall 1013 and service trench 1005. Abutting wall 1006 were yellow glazed tiles (1009), which in turn were bonded to wall 1008, which overlay wall 1006 and abutted wall 1011. This wall may be interpreted as part of an underground toilet block or underpass, possibly constructed later than the rest of the foundations.

A brick manhole (1004), and associated service trench (1005) truncated the natural subsoil in the centre of the trench. Sealing cut 1005, and directly overlying the natural subsoil at the southeastern end of the trench, was a brick floor surface, which comprised a 0.2m–0.3m thick layer of hard grey-blue concrete (1002) overlain by one course of purple engineering bricks (1001). This floor surface was truncated by modern services (1003/1014), which also cut through the silt and rubble overburden (1010).

Plate 4. Surface 1001, sealed by overburden 1010, truncated by modern services 1003/1014

The overburden throughout the whole trench was an exceptionally compact mix of brown silt with fragments of brick, concrete and cinder blocks, and lenses of orange sand (1010). The watching brief through the entire width of the earth bank was excavated to a maximum of 2m, and the overburden (1010) was shown to be at least 2m deep, directly overlying walls 1011 and 1013.

6 THE FINDS

No finds were recovered either during the excavation or the watching brief.

7 DISCUSSION

It is possible that the earlier wall 1013 could relate to Oppenheim's Glassworks, though as this wall was heavily truncated, and not stratigraphicallly related to any other deposits, little can be inferred from its identification, particularly in the absence of datable artifacts. The archaeological investigations showed that no other archaeological features, structures or deposits relating to Oppenheim's Glassworks were present in the study area. The archaeological work showed that the construction of the former Snow Hill Station truncated all previous archaeological deposits, as these more recent structures were identified immediately above, or cutting, the natural subsoil.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Ballymore Properties Ltd. Thanks are also due to the groundworks team from Erris Construction, and from St Clements Plant Hire. Thanks also go to Dr Michael Hodder, Planning Archaeologist, who monitored the project on behalf of Birmingham City Council. Work on site was undertaken by Mary Duncan and Eleanor Ramsey. Eleanor Ramsey produced the written report which was illustrated by Bryony Ryder, and edited by Mark Hewson who also managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

9 REFERENCES

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SITE
BIRMINGHAM
BIRMINGHAM DISTRICT
Perry Barr
Upper Witton
Erdington
Witton
Stockland Green
Birchfield
Gravelly Hill
Bromford
Nechells
Aston
Washwood Heath
Newtown
Ward End
DUDDESTON
Vauxhall
Saltley
Nechells Green
ADDERLEY PARK STA
Alum Rock
Stechford
Bordesley
Bordesley Green
Little Bromwich
Lee Bank
Digbeth
Yardley
Highgate
Small Heath
Sparkbrook
Hay Mills
South Yardley
Balsall Heath
Tyseley
Stockfield
Cannon Hill Park
Nature Centre
Sparkhill
Moseley
Acocks Green
SPRING RD STA
Moor Green
Wake Green
Olton
Springfield
Hall Green
King's Heath
Billesley
Billesley Common
Yardley Wood
Shirley
Sharmans Cross
Kineton Green
Ulverley Green
Friary
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Fig. 1

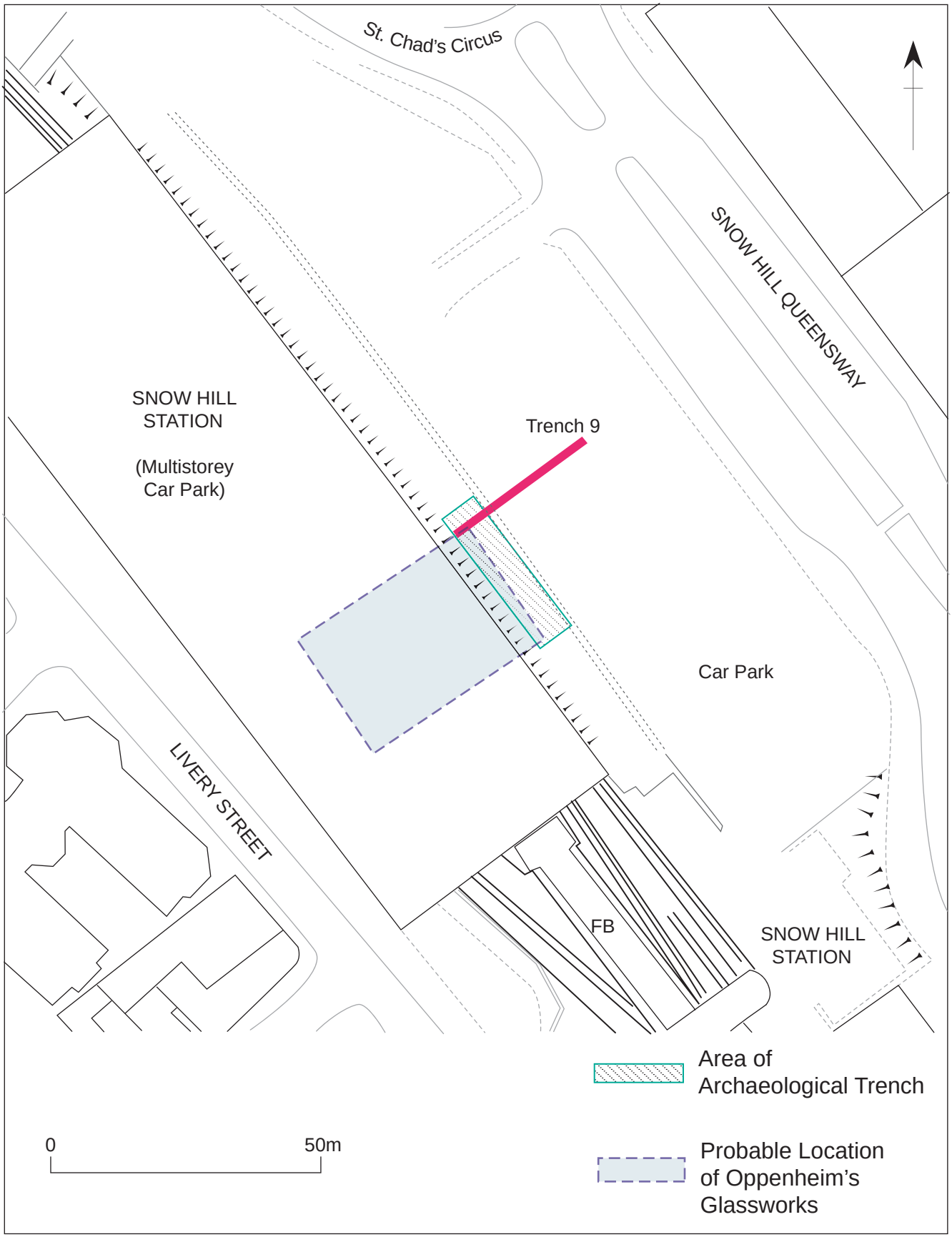
St. Chad's Circus
SNOW HILL QUEENSWAY
SNOW HILL
STATION
(Multistorey
Car Park)
Trench 9
Car Park
LIVERY STREET
FB
SNOW HILL
STATION
Area of
Archaeological Trench
0
50m
Probable Location
of Oppenheim's
Glassworks

Fig.2

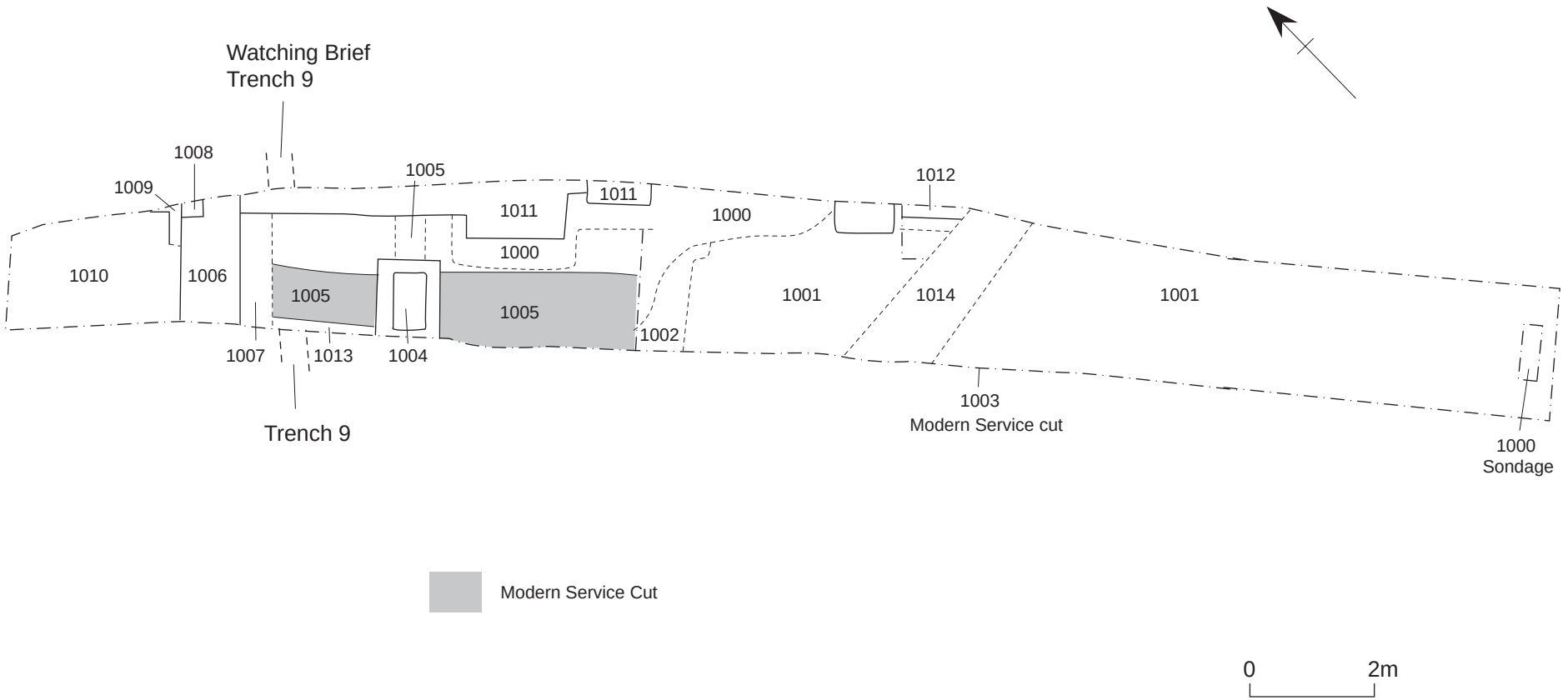
Watching Brief
Trench 9
1008
1009
1005
1011
1011
1012
1000
1000
1010
1006
1005
1005
1001
1014
1001
1002
1007
1013
1004
Trench 9
1003
Modern Service cut
1000
Sondage
Modern Service Cut
0
2m

Fig.3