

birmingham archaeology

Old Hall Street,
Wolverhampton

An Archaeological
Watching Brief

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**OLD HALL STREET, WOLVERHAMPTON:
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF 2007**

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was performed at the site of the Alan Garner Building, Old Hall Street, Wolverhampton (NGR SO 916 983) in February-May 2007. The work was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology on behalf of Wolverhampton City Council. The watching brief was required by the Black Country Archaeologist, during development works within the Alan Garner Building.

The site lies within the area of a known Elizabethan Great Hall, with the development suspected to be positioned over the south-western corner of the moat associated with the Great Hall, as indicated by prior excavations in the area (Cutler & Ramsey 2005).

Four trenches for mass concrete bases and the underpinning of existing walls were excavated. One further trench, measuring 2.10 x 5m was excavated for the emplacement of a lift shaft.

Archaeological observation and recording demonstrated the presence of preserved basal portions of the western arm of the moat in the area of the lift shaft and subsequent later moat infilling in two (potentially three) of the foundation trenches. Additionally, material possibly associated with an inner curtain wall from the moat was identified, and the stratigraphic sequence associated with the construction of the current 20th century building observed.

OLD HALL STREET, WOLVERHAMPTON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF, 2007.

1 INTRODUCTION

Between February and May 2007 Birmingham Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief during development works undertaken within the Alan Garner Centre, Old Hall Street, Wolverhampton (hereafter referred to as the site). The work was commissioned by Wolverhampton City Council in advance of refurbishment of an existing structure as a proposed school and library facility.

This report outlines the results of the assessment, which was carried out on between 22/2/2007 and 18/05/2007, and which was prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (IFA 1999).

The assessment conformed to a brief (2006) produced by the Black Country Archaeologist on behalf of Wolverhampton City Council and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2006), which was approved by the Black Country Archaeologist prior to implementation in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990).

2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

The site is located just to the south of Old Hall Street, in central Wolverhampton, and is centred on NGR SO 916 983 (Figure 1).

The present character of the site is a large brick-built building, referred to as the Alan Garner Centre, constructed around the turn of the 19th century. The structure was constructed as a special school and is to be refurbished as part of on-going city council works. All groundworks were performed inside the structure, excavating through the concrete floor of the southern ground floor level of the building.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of the project was to record any remains which were identified during the refurbishment. These aims were achieved through a series of archaeological monitoring visits to the site during groundworks.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The site lies within the known area of a moated Elizabethan Great Hall, the 'Old Hall' in Wolverhampton. This hall, and its associated moat, visible in historic maps from the late 18th century, was converted internally into a works for japanning (European imitation laquerwork) in the 19th century, and demolished in 1883. The current Alan Garner building was constructed to the south of Old Hall Street as a special school, around the turn of the 20th century.

A sequence of archaeological works have been undertaken in the area prior to this watching brief, in the form of a desk-based assessment (Watt 2000), evaluation (Williams 2000), and a watching brief (Figure 4) over the projected north-eastern corner over the moat.

Previous archaeological fieldwork had identified the positions of the northern, eastern and southern arms of the moat, with a full section excavated immediately to the east. There was evidence that the upcast from the original excavation of the moat had been placed within the bounds of the moat to create a building platform for the internal structures. Additionally, the ground-plan of the north-west wing of the old hall was exposed and elements of a sandstone inner curtain wall for the moat were identified.

Based upon the moat plans proposed by these studies, the site appears to be situated over the south-western corner of the moat (Figure 4) and it was therefore expected that deposits associated with the medieval moat would be encountered during works in this area.

5 METHODOLOGY

The groundworks comprised of the excavation of four trenches (of 2m x 1.2m, dug to depths of between 1.4 and 2.7m) in the southern half of the current structure (Figure 2), and of a larger trench (Trench 5, 5m x 2.2m, excavated to a depth of 3.12m) defining the southern extent of a planned lift shaft.

Excavation was undertaken using a mini-excavator for deposits within reach of the machine arm, then by hand and with use of pneumatic drills below this depth. Pneumatic drills were required to break the compacted deposits of post-medieval rubble within the excavated areas, and in Trench 5 to carve out the dense natural clays seen at depth.

All groundworks were monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist and complemented with the salvage recording of any archaeological deposits and features revealed during works. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, and sections drawn through all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy. A comprehensive written record was maintained through the use of a numbered context system on pro-forma context and feature cards. Photographs supplemented written and drawn records.

All recovered finds were cleaned, marked and conserved as necessary, in accordance with 'A strategy for the care and investigation of finds' from English Heritage.

The full site archive includes all artefactual remains recovered from the site. The site archive will be prepared in accordance with 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 the appropriate repository, subject to permission from the landowner.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Foundation Trench 1

Trench 1 (Figures 2 and 3) was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.70m with the base of the excavation being defined by a shallow cut (**109**) cutting into the natural clay. This natural material was composed of mid-orange gravelly clay. **109** sloped downwards from W-E in section and in its visible extent had a shallow bowl-shaped profile. Primary fill **108** of **109** consisted of 0.05m of mid-orange sand and brown sandy-silt with charcoal flecking. Above **108** lay a secondary layer of black/dark brown sandy silt, which again held charcoal flecks (**107**). This deposit had a thickness of 0.45m, and terminated at 2.20m depth in a horizontal interface between **107** and **106**- an apparently post-medieval rubble layer. **106** was composed of a

mixed soft redeposited natural clay containing post-medieval brick rubble and had a thickness of 0.30m. Above this lay a compacted layer of rubble with a silt-sand matrix (**105**) that contained large quantities of 19th century tile and brick. Above **105**, a facing of brick wall foundations was visible in the south-facing section (Figure 3), however this foundation did not extend into the area of the trench. Overlying both **105** and this foundation was **104**, a light brown silty-sand with frequent fragments of stone and post-medieval tile, with a thickness of 0.25-0.35m. This was sealed by a grey-brown silty-sand with further fragments of tile (**103**). The uppermost deposits present were concrete floor **101** with associated hardcore deposit **102**, both with a thickness of 0.10m.

6.2 Foundation Trench 2

Trench 2 was excavated to a depth of 1.45m, the depth at which redeposited dense natural clay was encountered. This pinkish-red silty clay (**204**) was cut by a cellar wall, or wall associated with the 19th century japanning factory, and was interpreted as possible upcast from the medieval moat excavation (although redeposited natural was also used for the in-fill of the southern moat during the 19th century- Cuttler & Ramsey 2005). Above **204** lay a coarse silty-sand that included large fragments of hardcore and coal (**203**), which was post-medieval in date. **203** was present from 1.45-0.95m in depth and was sealed by a thin, but dense layer, of ash and possible metal waste products most likely associated with the 19th century japanning works. Above this waste layer lay **202**, a loose mid-grey brown sandy-silt containing coal fragments, post-medieval slate and brick. **202** was in turn sealed by **201**, which consisted of recent/19th century brickwork forming the current floor level.

6.3 Foundation Trench 3

Trench 3 was excavated to a depth of 2.68m onto the top of natural sand. Sealing this was 0.28m of yellow-brown sand **305** with pebbles and ceramic building material fragments dating from the mid-medieval to post-medieval period. This was overlain by 0.60m of grey-brown silt **304** which contained charcoal flecking and occasional brick fragments. Both **304** and **305** possibly represent post-medieval fill events associated with the moat. In turn, **304** was sealed by compacted demolition rubble **303**. Overlying this, at a depth of 0.90m below current ground level, was a compact ashy material similar to that encountered in Trench 2. All the above was sealed by **302**, a mixed layer of post-medieval demolition material with a loosely consolidated matrix of grey silty-sand. The final deposit within Trench 3 was **301**, a layer of recent brickwork forming the current floor level, with a thickness of 0.20m.

6.4 Foundation Trench 4

Trench 4 was excavated to a depth of 0.5m, the depth at which natural red-brown clay **407** was encountered. **407** was sealed by **406**, which composed of a dark brown silty-sand containing compacted brick rubble of 19th century date. **406** was present between depths of 1.50-0.90m, and lay below **405**, a reddish-brown silty-sand that contained loose fragments of 19th century demolition material. Overlying **405** to the west was **404**, compositionally similar to **405**, but different in colour with lenses of grey silty-sand. Both **404** and **405** were sealed by light brown silty-sand **403** that contained occasional fragments of 19th century tile, which in turn was overlain by 0.10m of cemented hardcore **402** for the current concrete floor **401**.

6.5 Trench 5 (Lift Shaft)

Trench 5 (Figures 2 and 3) was the area of the watching brief excavated to both the greatest depth and across the largest area. Excavation terminated at 3.12m depth, 0.72m below the depth at which red-brown natural clay (**100**) was first encountered.

The earliest archaeological feature visible within Trench 5 was **1008**, a shallow sloping cut with a bowl-shaped profile encountered in the western side of the trench. This cut appeared to slope towards the west and was interpreted as a preserved basal portion of the cut of the medieval moat (due to the shallow slope of the cut and the correlation with the moat depth and location recorded in Cuttler & Ramsey 2005; Figure 4). The primary fill of **1008** was **1013**, a grey-brown waterlogged silty clay seen in the western extent of Trench 5. **1013** contained 18th century pottery, fragments of bone mortar, charcoal, and unidentifiable fragments of preserved leather. **1013** had its upper limit at 2.80m below current ground level, and was sealed by **1007**, a dark, charcoal-rich silty clay forming a secondary fill of **1008**. This deposit, approximately 0.10m thick, contained a mixed collection of early 19th pottery fragments. **1007** appeared again to be an in-situ moat fill, perhaps dating to immediately prior to the suspected in-fill of the southern portions of the moat in the early 19th century.

To the east side of the trench, visible only in the north-facing section, was a small section of heavily-fired, rough-made red bricks, bonded with prodigious quantities of lime mortar. This brickwork (**1015**) appeared to be placed directly onto the natural clay **1009**, and had an undeterminable relationship to **1008**. Immediately above **1007** and **1015**, at depths of between 1.80 and 2.40m, was a layer of brownish-red silty clay with occasional sub-rounded pebbles, mortar and charcoal flecking, and fragments of medieval and post-medieval pottery. This deposit (**1004**) also contained loose rough-hewn blocks of sandstone towards its base and fragments of post-medieval brick and slag throughout and appeared to represent the post-medieval infilling of the moat.

1004 is cut to the north by **1014**, the foundation cut for the early 20th century central wall (**1005**) of the Alan Garner Building (that formed the northern boundary of Trench 5). This cut extends to the base of the excavated trench across the whole area and has a steep u-shaped profile. Following the cut of **1014**, a stepped series of brick foundations was emplaced (**1006**), and wall **1005** constructed (early 20th century). The base of the foundation cut was backfilled to the east with **1012**, a dark silty-clay mixed with mortar and metal wastes (possibly redeposited waste from the 19th century japanning works), which has a thickness of 0.30m.

To the west, **1014** is back-filled from its base with **1003**, a thick deposit of silty-clay containing large amounts of post-medieval tile, brick, and mortar. **1003** seals **1012** to the east and sits above **1004** across the whole area. This deposit, with an upper limit at 0.70m depth, appears to be a recent make-up layer associated with the construction of the Alan Garner building, c. 1909. **1003** is sealed to the west by **1011**, a thin (0.10m) level of ash and mortar waste with coal and coke inclusions, possibly a re-use of local industrial/demolition waste from the japanning works for levelling during the 20th century construction. Above this lies **1010**, a dark grey/black deposit of industrial waste (coal, coke, and metal wastes) appearing to fulfil the same function as **1011**, with a thickness of 0.20m. **1010** was succeeded, at depths of 0.60-0.20m, by **1002**, a reddish-brown silty-clay containing large amounts of coarse building material, service pipe, and Victorian tile. This would appear to be the final levelling layer to bring the internal ground-surface of the Alan Garner Building up to its current level, and may (as may be the case with deposits **1010**, **1011** and **1003**) have re-used material from the demolition of the 19th century japanning works. The final deposit within Trench 5 is **1001**, composed of recent concrete and hardcore, of 0.20m thickness, used to create the current concrete floor level.

7 THE FINDS- BY ERICA MACEY-BRACKEN

Finds from the site included pottery, animal bone, ceramic tile, clay pipe, glass, shell and slag. The material was quantified by count and weight followed by macroscopic examination.

Pottery – by Stephanie Ratkai

The earliest pottery recovered from the site was a group of 51 sherds of late 18th century date (304, 305, 1004, 1013). This group included several sherds of creamware, slip-coated ware, porcelain and coarseware, as well as individual sherds of blackware, tin-glazed earthenware, blue-painted pearlware, green shell-edge plate or possibly 'cauliflower ware', Westerwald stoneware and pearlware. The blackware sherd could be residual and may date back to the 17th century.

Later pottery consisted of a group of 29 sherds of 19th century pottery (303, 1007). Contexts dating to the early part of the 19th century (1007) also had some residual creamware and two sherds of tortoiseshell ware; a lid and a moulded bird, which dated to c.a. 1760.

The most recent piece of pottery was a fragment from a stoneware bottle of late 19th – early 20th century date (1002). This bottle retained part of its painted label, where the words ER / S / LLED, / Y ROAD, / NGHAM / Stopper, could be seen

Animal Bone

Two contexts (303, 304) produced ten fragments of animal bone. All but one fragment of bone (303) was identified as cattle bone, including one fragment from a juvenile animal. The final bone (304) was tentatively identified as a dog femur.

Glass

Four pieces of glass (106 x 1, 107 x 1, 303 x 2) were recovered from the site. All the pieces were from glass bottles, the most complete being the base of a 19th century clear glass bottle (106) embossed with the words 'R. WADDI.....& SONS MAKERS MEXBORO' on one side, and 'FISH... and WOLVE...on the other. The base of a green glass wine bottle of probable 18th century date was also recovered (107), as were two fragments of a green glass bottle and a clear blue glass bottle that were partially encased in mortar (303). Both of these bottles also appeared to be of 19th century date.

Tile

Ten fragments of tile were recovered (107 x 1, 108 x 5, 304 x 4). The tile was all in a hard-fired coarse orange fabric. No diagnostic fragments were noted, but it seems likely that, in common with the tile assemblages from earlier excavations on the site, the tile is of 18th – 19th century date.

Other Finds

Other finds from the site included five clay pipe stem fragments (107 x 1, 303 x 4), two unworked pieces of shell (303 x 1, 304 x 1), a piece of slag (304) and an amorphous piece of leather (305). None of these pieces were datable.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief successfully fulfilled the brief and identified and recorded the archaeological deposits disturbed during the refurbishment works.

In addition, it can be seen that the information from the watching brief has increased our understanding of the archaeology of the site.

The sequence of deposits seen in the basal region of Trench 5 and in Trenches 1, 3, and possibly 2, appears to match the composition and sequence of basal moat fills and later in-filling seen within the southern area of the site during the prior excavation (Cuttler and Ramsey 2005). This would suggest that the moat has been located beneath each of these interventions, with the basal Trench 5 deposits representing the southern end of the western arm of the moat. This may allow further refinement of the proposed course of the early medieval moat (Figure 4). However, it would appear that the plot previously defined (Cuttler and Ramsey 2005) is generally accurate in its predictions.

The position, cross-section, and alignment of masonry fragment **1015** suggest it may represent a late medieval remnant of an inner curtain wall of the moat, as identified in prior investigations. However, the fabric of this feature differs from that previously recorded (roughly-fired, probable hand-made brick as opposed to ashlar sandstone).

Additionally, it appears that **1004** may represent the infill of the moat using natural boulder clay from the area, consistent with in-filled areas of the southern moat arm previously seen. Consequently, the sandstone blocks present in this deposit may represent fragments of the inner curtain wall pushed into the moat during the in-fill and levelling events.

Finally, our understanding of the effects that the construction of the 20th century Alan Garner Building has had upon the underlying archaeology, and of the construction of this structure, has been enhanced. It has been shown that construction of the interior of the Alan Garner Building, in particular the northern cellarage, has effectively removed archaeological deposits, although this material may have been re-used in the levelling events following the construction of the cellars and central E-W wall.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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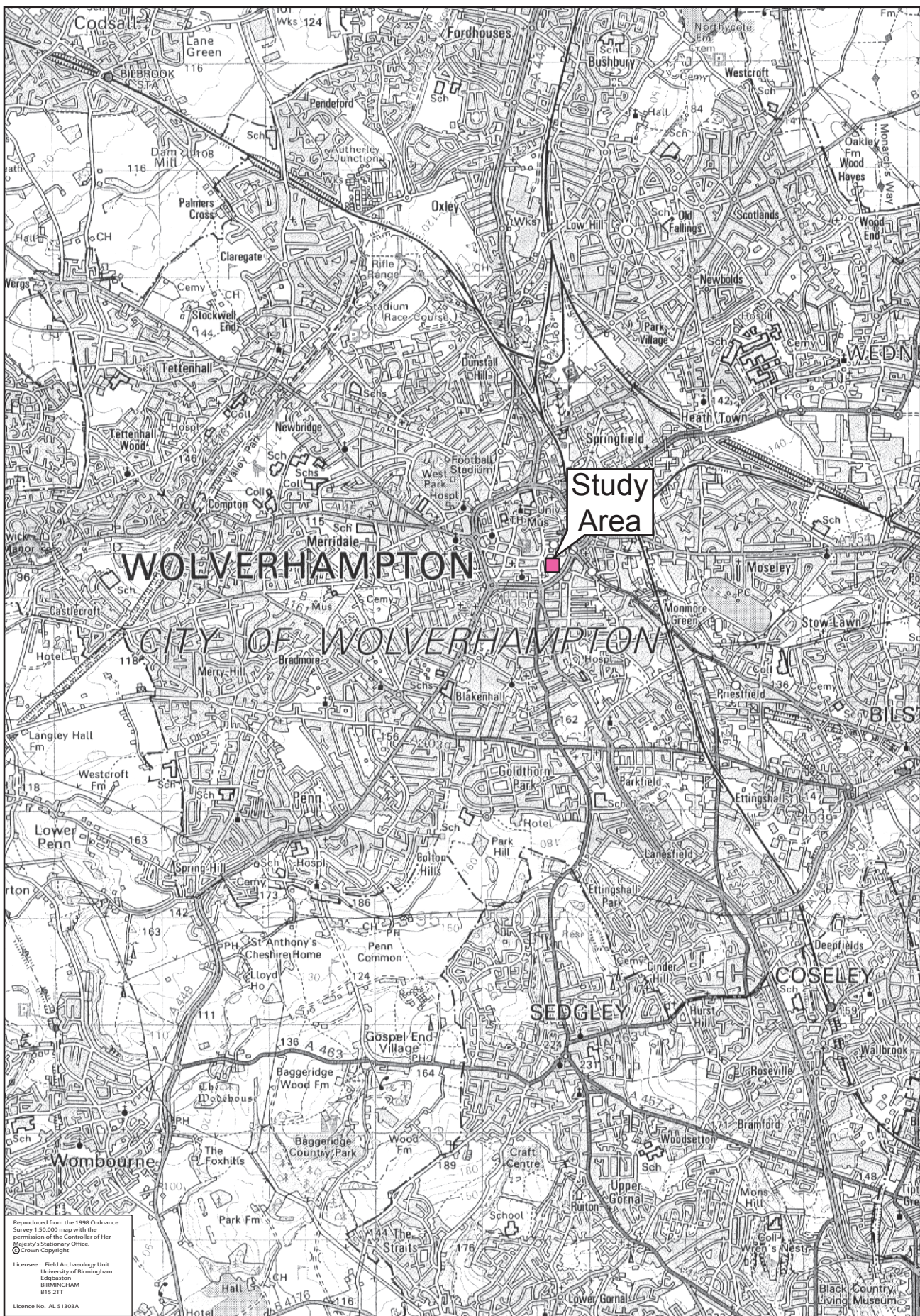


Figure 1

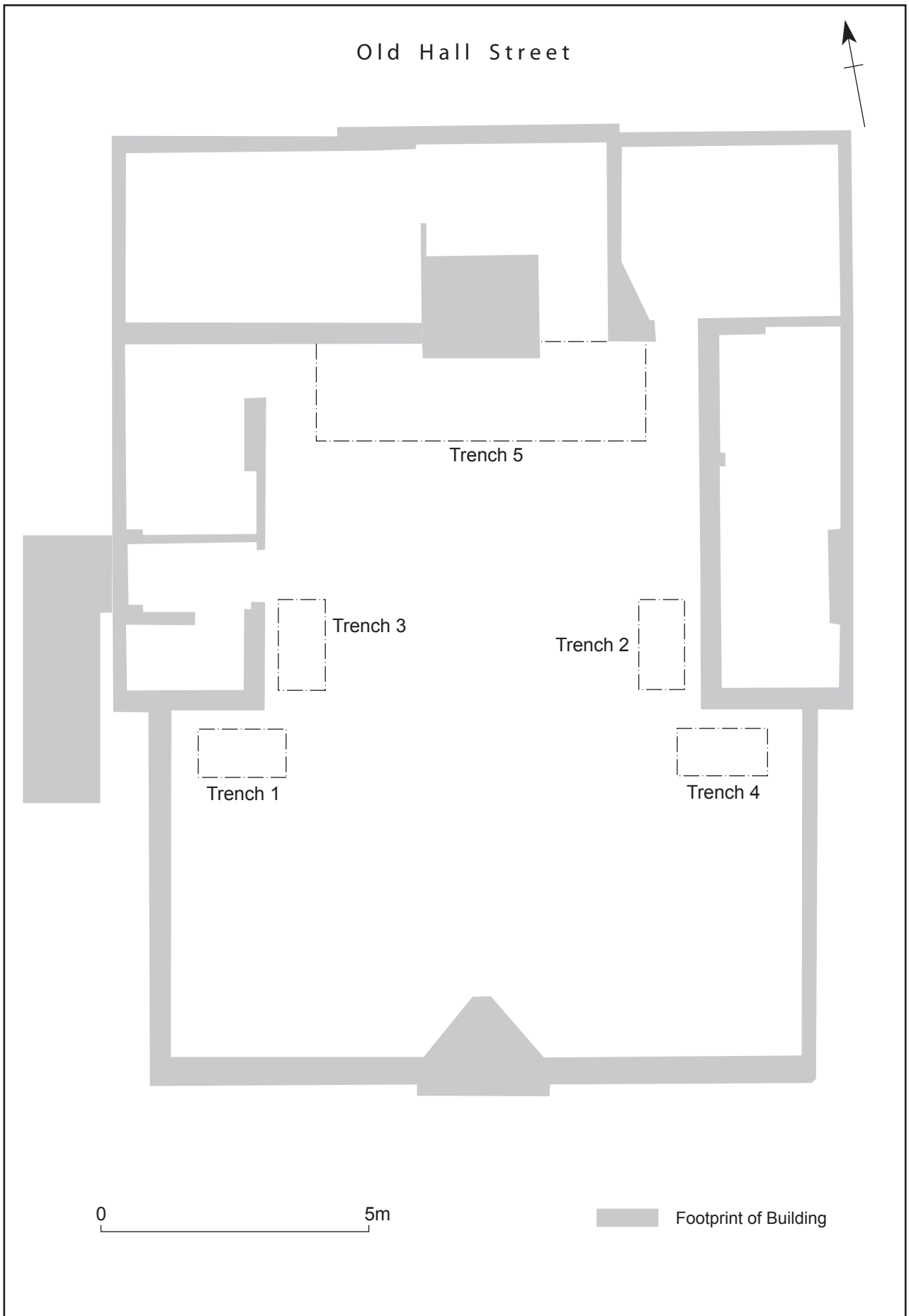


Fig.2

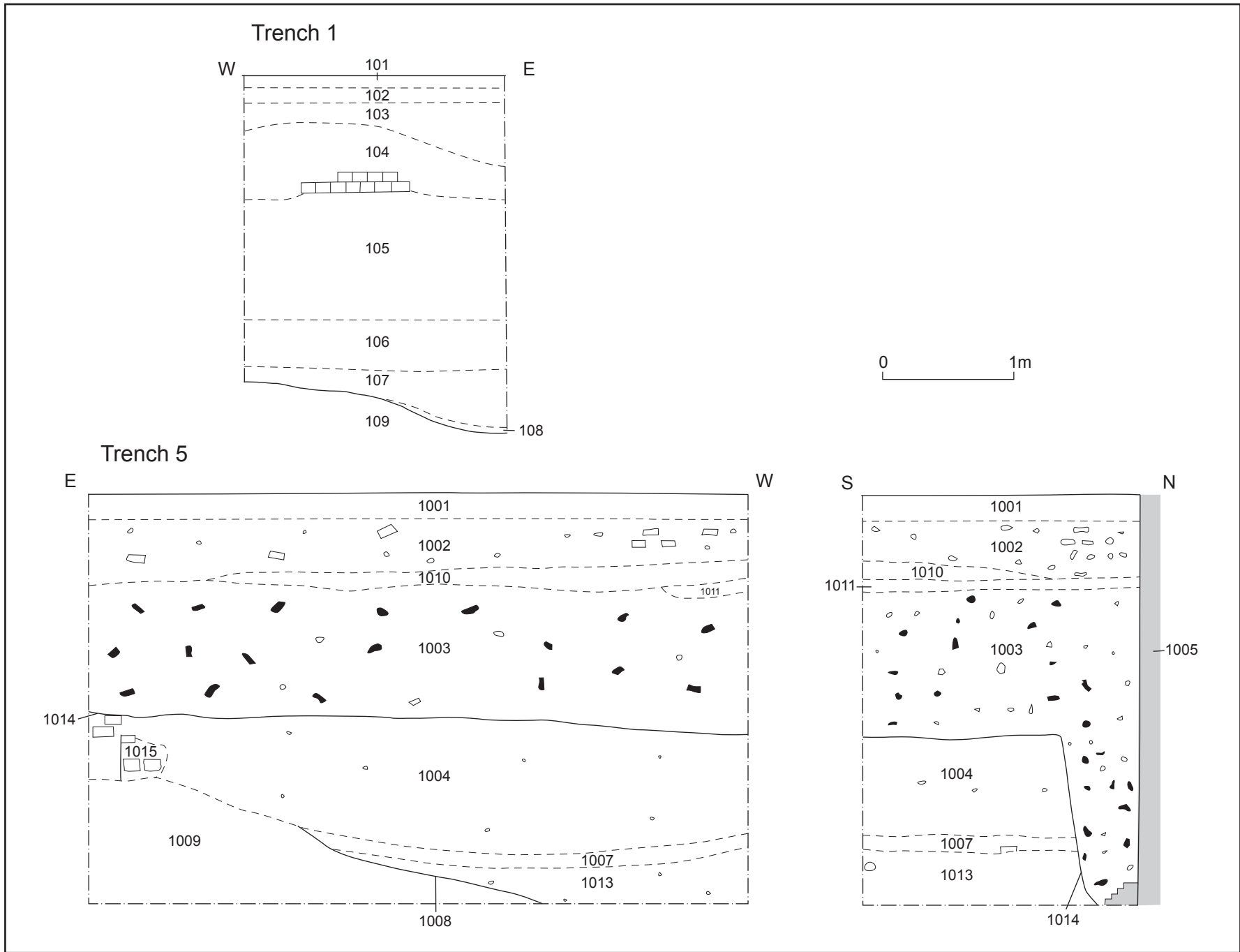


Fig.3

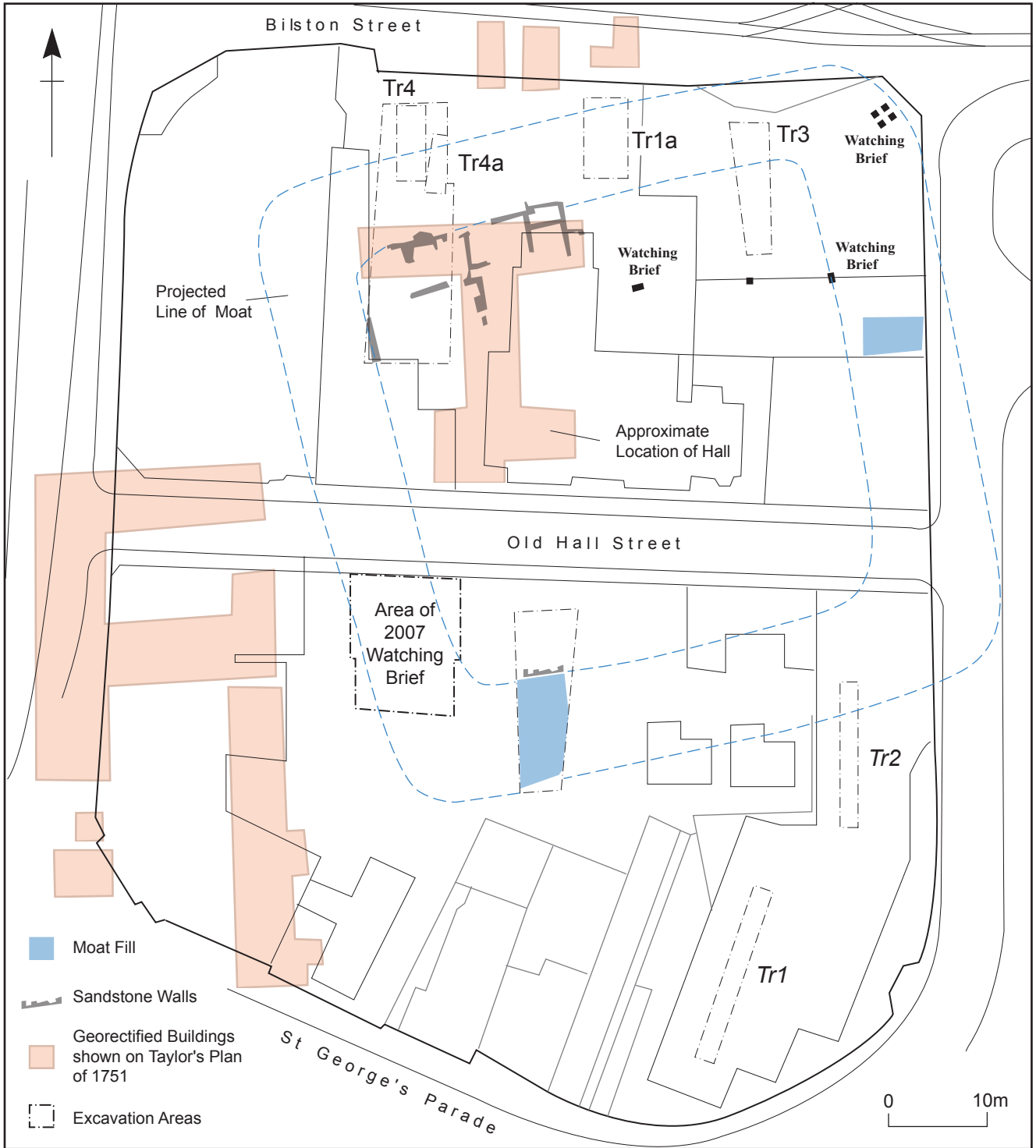


Fig.4