

**Dean House, Upper Dean Street,
Birmingham**

**Post- Excavation Assessment
and Research Design 2003**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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Birmingham
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and Research Design 2003**

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DEAN HOUSE, UPPER DEAN STREET, BIRMINGHAM POST- EXCAVATION ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH DESIGN 2003

1.0 SUMMARY

An archaeological excavation at Dean House, Upper Dean Street, Birmingham (NGR 073 864) was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of DCD (Dean Street) in advance of proposed redevelopment of the site for residential flats. CgMs Consulting carried out a desk-based assessment and, subsequently upon this, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned to undertake an excavation in April 2003.

A square pit and post-holes of later post-medieval date were encountered, as well as water-lain deposits, which may have marked the location of two former watercourses (Pudding Brook and Dirty Brook) which are thought to have crossed the site. It is possible that these watercourses were part of a system, which included two medieval moats formerly located to the northeast and northwest of the site. A later deposit of dark earth was also encountered and this may be equivalent to cultivation layers observed on other excavations close to Upper Dean Street. A 19th century brick-built culvert truncated the western end of the excavation. A considerable amount of later overburden probably representing levelling and demolition layers were also observed.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background to the project

This report outlines the results of an excavation at Dean House, Upper Dean Street, Birmingham (NGR 073 864) hereinafter referred to as the site. The site is located on the southern side of Upper Dean Street in the centre of Birmingham, at the junction of Dean Street and Upper Dean Street (Fig. 1). Dean House currently occupies the site with open ground along its frontage.

A planning application for the development of the site for residential flats required a desk-based assessment which was undertaken by CgMs Consulting (CgMs 2001). It was considered possible that the site might contain evidence relating to industrial activities during the medieval and post-medieval periods in an area favourably located close to an abundant water supply. It was also thought possible that deposits associated with the two former watercourses, known as Dirty Brook and Pudding Brook, might be present on the site.

The format of this report broadly follows the recommendations of *The Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991), and adhered to the broad aims and methodology set down in a specification prepared by CgMs Consulting (2002) and approved by the Birmingham City Archaeologist (BCC 2001).

2.2 Aims

The aims of the archaeological work were to:

- Establish the presence or absence of archaeological deposits and features within the proposed development site.

- Define the nature, extent and significance of surviving deposits and features.
- Characterise the palaeo-environmental history of the site.

More specifically the objectives of the excavation were to identify deposits relating to the medieval and post-medieval periods and to identify deposits associated with the two former watercourses.

3.0 METHOD

It was intended that a single trench measuring 35m in length by 2m in width be opened along the northern frontage of the site (Fig.2). However no excavation was allowed within a distance of 7m of large concrete retaining wall located along the eastern boundary of the site. The provision of access to the west and the constraints of space for the storage of spoil also meant that the length of the trench was reduced to a final length of approximately 15m.

Removal of overburden was undertaken by a 360 degree mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision. The machined horizon was cleaned further, as appropriate, by hand, which defined the archaeological features and deposits at their uppermost horizons (Plate 1). Archaeological contexts were sampled for artifactual and environmental evidence. The sampling strategy particularly targeted discrete features and/or waterlogged deposits. The trench was dug in two halves and employed shoring boxes for logistical and safety reasons.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by plans (at 1:20 and 1:50), sections (at 1:10 and 1:20), monochrome and colour print and colour slide photography.

4.0 RESULTS (Fig. 3)

The natural subsoil consisted of mixed bands and pockets of red clay and gravel (1000) located at a depth of approximately 2.2m below ground level. This was overlain by a shallow layer of gravel which contained substantial deposits of iron pan (1018, 1024) and which varied in depth from 0.06m to 0.13m progressively from west to east. Approximately 5m from the western end of the trench was a layer of redeposited or disturbed natural gravel (1015) which produced a small amount of medieval tile. Layer 1015 had been cut by a linear feature (F105, Fig. 3) containing large rounded pebbles (1026). This measured approximately 4m in width and was orientated roughly northeast to southwest. The pebbles had been overlain by a grey/black silty clay (1017) which appeared to be waterlogged. Layer 1017 became progressively deeper from west to east. This varied in depth from approximately 0.10m in the west end up to 0.2m in the east end of the trench.

Along the western edge of F105 was a posthole (F103) and a stakehole (F101, Plate 2). Posthole F103 was very truncated and measured approximately 0.2m in diameter. It was filled by a dark grey clayey silt with fragments of charcoal (1012). Stakehole F101 measured approximately 0.08m in diameter and 0.17m in depth and had a U-shaped profile. The degraded remains of the wooden stake (1011) were preserved within the fill. Both features produced 18th/19th-century pottery.

To the west of F105 was a rectangular pit (F104, Fig. 3 and Plate 3) which measured 0.6m in width by 0.9m in length. This was cut to a depth of 0.3m and contained a primary fill of dark grey silty clay (1016), which was possibly waterlogged. The upper fill consisted of a dark brown to black silty clay (1014) which contained pieces of wood and twig. Both contexts produced 18th/19th-century pottery.

All features were sealed by a grey brown silty clay (1013). This was in turn sealed by a thick deposit of dark grey/brown sandy clay with silt (1001, Fig. 3) which was 0.8m in depth at the eastern extent of the trench. A narrow band of clinker (1002) overlay layer 1001, which was sealed by a deposit of mixed yellow/brown sand and grit (1003) containing rubble and crushed mortar. This was cut by a brick built culvert which was aligned northwest to southeast at the western extent of the trench. The culvert was overlain by layers of overburden (1004, 1005, 1006, 1007) and reinforced concrete (1008).

5.0 INTERPRETATION

The large rounded pebbles (1026) defined a 4m wide feature aligned perpendicular to the trench. It seems possible that this was the location of one of the former watercourses. Although lacking clearly defined edges, it may be that the pebbles represented the base of a severely truncated watercourse. If this is the case then they are most likely to once have been part of the Pudding Brook, which was once on a northeast to southwest alignment within this part of the site (Figs. 2 and 4). Alternatively, it is possible that the pebbles represented a surface or a lane, which may explain the absence of clearly defined edges. The dating of this feature is problematic although it may have been medieval or perhaps, contemporary with the earlier post-medieval features (F101 and F103) found in association with it.

According to Sheriff's map dated 1808 (Fig. 4), a second watercourse, the Dirty Brook, may have been aligned northeast to southwest across the western end of the excavated area. No evidence of a watercourse was detected here, although the western end of the trench had been subjected to later disturbance, including the digging of a pit in the post-medieval period and the construction of a 19th century brick culvert.

The location of the posthole and stakehole (F101 and F103) at the western edge of the pebble spread may be coincidental but could however, be part of a structure deliberately positioned along the edge of the watercourse. This may have been a timber revetment or a fence along the bank. The function of the rectangular pit (F104) to the west was unclear although it may have been associated with the watercourse and is probably contemporary. Pottery retrieved from the pit would seem to place this activity in the 18th or 19th centuries.

At some point the area would appear to have been levelled down, an activity that removed most of the deposits associated with the watercourses. The grey/brown silty clay (1013) which overlay and sealed the all features, appears to post-date this. This layer has an absence of cut features which, coupled with the paucity of pottery, indicates less activity in the area once the watercourses ceased to flow. Any associated activities, which required a water source, would therefore have been discontinued and, perhaps, moved to a more favourable location.

The thick layer of dark grey/brown clay silt was noticeably free of extraneous material such as brick, rubble and pottery, although heavily flecked with charcoal throughout. The depth of this deposit, coupled with the lack of additional material, could therefore, point to it having

been some form of cultivation layer perhaps dating to a period when the site was located in areas of agricultural land before its absorption into the town. Ploughing during this period would, of course, have resulted in the truncation or scouring out of any earlier archaeological deposits. In terms of dating it should be considered that even as late as 1828 the brooks and field divisions are still shown on maps (CgMs 2001).

6.0 THE FINDS *by Annette Hancocks*

Description	Quantification	Spot-dating
Machine excavated/ unstratified	1x Post-medieval pottery (25g), neck of stoneware bottle 1x Post-medieval clay pipe stem (9g)	18 th /19 th century
1009 (F100)	12x Post-medieval pottery (360g); Blackwares, creamwares, yellow wares and willow pattern	19 th /20 th century
1010 (F101)	3x Post-medieval ceramic roof tile (8g) 1x Post-medieval pottery (<1g), blackware 1x Post-medieval clay pipe stem (<1g)	18 th /19 th century
1011 (F102)	1x fragment of waterlogged wood	undated
1012 (F103)	1x Post-medieval pottery (3g) 2x coal (1g)	18 th /19 th century
Machining disturbance over F104	5x Post-medieval pottery (62g; includes 1x Blackware rim and whiteware handle) 1x Oyster shell (19g)	18 th /19 th century
1013	1x Post-medieval vessel glass (43g) 2x Post-medieval pottery (18g), blackware	18 th /19 th century
1014 (F104)	6x Post-medieval ceramic roof tile (247g) 4x Post-medieval vessel glass (58g) 6x Post-medieval clay pipe stem (10g) Animal bone (12g) 6x Post-medieval pottery (62g), includes stoneware and blackware Stone with mortar attached (35g)	18 th /19 th century
1015 (Upper horizon natural)	7x Post-medieval ceramic roof tile (28g) 1x Post-medieval vessel glass (<1g)	18 th /19 th century
1016 (F104)	3x Post-medieval vessel glass (11g) 1x Post-medieval pottery (23g), Blackware 1x Post-medieval clay pipe stem (<1g)	18 th /19 th century

Table 1 Spot dated finds

The material was rapidly scanned, identified and spot-dated as detailed in Table 1 above. A total of 38 sherds (554g) of post-medieval ceramics were identified. These comprised of mainly blackwares and stonewares of 18th-19th century date. It is recommended that for full publication a short summary be produced on these ceramics.

A small quantity of animal bone (12g) was rapidly assessed for diagnostic elements and deemed to warrant no further detailed analysis or further work.

One piece of wood was recovered from Feature F101. This comprised the fragmentary remains of what was thought to be a stake. This however this was too small to be identified for the purposes of assessment. The wood has been stored in a waterlogged environment to prevent further deterioration.

The wood is not diagnostic and warrants no further action.

7.0 THE PLANT REMAINS by Marina Ciaraldi

The excavation uncovered various features, which had the potential for preservation of waterlogged organic remains. Sample F104/1014 was collected from a peaty deposit close to a feature identified as watercourse. Sample 1017 was collected from the bottom of the water channel and consisted of a grey silt, in which pebbles of different size were embedded. Soil samples of 20 litres were taken from the features described above. Sub samples of 1 litre and 300ml respectively were wet sieved on a 0.3 sieve. The fraction recovered on the sieve was then sorted under a low power stereomicroscope.

7.1 Results and recommendations

The sample from the watercourse (1017) did not contain any organic remains. Sample F104/1014, on the other hand, contained some waterlogged organic remains. A list of identified seeds is provided in Table 2 below.

The seeds present in the samples include species already identified amongst post-medieval deposits from various sites in Birmingham (Ciaraldi forthcoming). Species such as the meadow/creeping/ bulbous buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus/acris/repens*), sedges (*Carex* sp.) and water pepper (*Persicaria hydropiper* Spach) are indicative of a wet environment. The presence of some *Daphnia*'s ephippia indicates that water was present in the feature. The numerous leaves found in the sample, some of which identified as those of willows (*Salix* sp.) and poplars (*Populus* sp.) suggests the presence of water-loving trees. It is likely that these trees were growing along the watercourse. There are no cultivated plants amongst the identified species and only a few seeds belong to species typical of disturbed places (particularly black bindweed (*Fallopia convolvulus* A. Love) and common orache (*Atriplex patula* L.)).

7.2 Conclusions

The species identified in the samples from Upper Dean Street are a reflection of the riparial vegetation growing along this section of the stream. The absence of species typical of ruderal/disturbed environments, such as those observed at Park Street, Moor Street or Edgbaston Street (Ciaraldi forthcoming) suggests that the anthropic occupation in this part of the town was limited.

On the basis of the limited results from the botanical analysis no further work is recommended on the plant macroremains. It is suggested, however, that the results of this analysis are integrated into the final publication. No insect remains were observed in the samples. It is, however, worth analysing the pollen from sample F104/1014 as this could provide information on the presence of cultivation in the vicinity of the site and would enrich the list of plant species present on site.

	Feature/ Context		F104/ 1014
	Flot / Wet Sieved		ws
	Mesh used (mm)		0.3
	Type of context		pit
	Phase		
Common names			
meadow/creeping/ bulbous buttercup	<i>Ranunculus bulbosus/acris/ repens</i>	seed	5
common orache	<i>Atriplex patula</i> L.	seed	1
common chickweed	<i>Stellaria media</i> Villars	seed	18
water pepper	<i>Persicaria hydropiper</i> Spach	seed	7
black bindweed	<i>Fallopia convolvulus</i> A. Love	seed	2
sheep's sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i> L.	seed	1
docks	<i>Rumex</i> sp.	seed	1
	Brassicaceae	seed	1
bramble/rose	<i>Rubus/Rosa</i>	thorn	1
	Leguminosae	seed	1
daisy family	Compositae	seed	2
sedges	<i>Carex</i> sp. flat	seed	2
grasses	Poaceae small	seed	1
	Trees and other		
poplar	<i>Populus</i> sp.	leaf	3
willow	<i>Salix</i> sp.	leaf	1
	bud		1
	leaf		xx
	<i>Daphnia</i> sp.		x
	coal		xx
	twigs		x

Table 2. Identified seeds from Sample F104/1014

8.0 DISCUSSION

The excavation at Upper Dean Street established the presence of late post medieval deposits within the proposed development site. In particular, it yielded evidence pertaining to one of the medieval watercourses known to have crossed the site. Moreover, it provided evidence of possible small scale post-medieval industry adjacent to the watercourse.

While located close to the medieval core of Birmingham there was no direct evidence of activity within the site during this period, although the natural water supply was exploited from an early date. The presence of iron panning in the upper horizon of the natural gravel and the dark waterlogged layer suggests the presence of standing water, a view further reinforced by the results of the environmental report. This may have resulted from an increase in the water table or may reflect a period of silting.

It was during the later part of the 18th century that the watercourses began to become redundant. In 1815-1817 the Birmingham Moat was filled in and its associated watercourses

were partly culverted. In the late 1820s/early 1830s the Parsonage Moat was destroyed by the building of a turnpike road connecting Worcester Street with Bromsgrove Street. This is now part of the current Pershore Street (Litherland and Watt 2000). Later deposits, and the absence of the full depth of the watercourse suggest that the area was levelled down during the early 19th century. The brick built culvert was probably part of the early 19th century absorption of watercourses into the drainage system of the town.

The watercourse was likely to have been part of a complex water system associated with the nearby Parsonage Moat (SMR 03014) and Manorial Moat (SMR 03015, Fig. 5) which were in existence by at least the 12th century (CgMs 2001). The site should therefore be seen against a medieval background, which witnessed the growth of Birmingham as an important market and trading centre. Not only was the site close to the thriving commercial hub of the medieval town but was also favourably located to exploit the natural water supply for industries such as tanning, textile production and metal working.

Much of the evidence from the site relates to post-medieval activity. The organic fills of pit F104 may suggest localised activities such as the production of hemp/flax or willow supple, all attested for during the medieval and post-medieval periods on other excavations in the locality. Willow supple, which was used by basket makers, is well-attested on the site as late as the early 19th century (Mould 1995) and it may have been the continuation of a much earlier tradition.

The deep deposit of dark charcoal flecked silt appeared to be characteristic of a cultivation soil. It may be that this deposit was the 'cultivation' layer which has been detected on other excavated sites around the Bull Ring area. It seems likely that this belonged to the period when the site was situated in areas of open fields, a situation which continued into the first half of the 19th century (CgMs 2001).

Reconciling the phases of activity outlined in this report with the documentary and cartographic evidence (CgMs 2001) is difficult due to the constraints of the excavation. The cartographic evidence indicates that the watercourses were still visible in 1828 (CgMs 2001). It therefore follows that the 'cultivation' layer, which sealed a layer of brown silt overlying the pebbles of the watercourse, was itself late. This would imply that the 'cultivation' layer belonged to a period between 1828 and 1847, by which time the area was built-up (CgMs 2001). It is possible, of course, that the layer was not a cultivated soil but imported material dumped to build up the ground after the watercourse had been levelled. If the site was prone to flooding from a fluctuating water-table then this may have necessitated the raising of the ground level, particularly if it was to be built on.

9.0 THE ARCHIVE

9.1 Paper Archive

MATERIAL	QUANTITY
Context Record Sheets	23
Feature Record Sheets	6
Plans and sections	6
Colour Prints	3
Colour Slides	0
Black & White Prints	1
Survey Sheets	1
Environmental Sheets	1
Assemblage summaries	10
Total	41

Table 3. Excavation Archive

As described above, the features and deposits on site have been dated principally through ceramic spot dating. Presently undated features may be phased through further analysis and definition of the stratigraphic sequence and their morphology. This will contribute to the research aims laid out in Section 2.2 and revised in Section 10.0.

9.2 Artefactual Data

The finds archive comprises of 10 assemblage summary sheets, less than half a box of finds (38 sherds). It does not pose any long term storage problems and will be deposited with Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, once ownership of finds has been finalised.

10.0 UPDATED PROJECT DESIGN AND PUBLICATION SYNOPSIS

The excavations at Upper Dean Street have provided a small but significant contribution to our understanding of later post-medieval Birmingham. This will contribute to a more complete understanding of the local industry and environment. This information is more significant when combined with the environmental data currently being provided from other sites in Birmingham, particularly Park Street, Floodgate Street and the Bull Ring excavations. While no further work is recommended on the plant macro remains, these results will be integrated into the final publication. This will be supplemented by an analysis of the pollen from Feature F104 which has the potential to provide a more diverse range of species and consequently improve our understanding of the local environment and land use during the later post-medieval period.

Stephanie Rátkai will examine the pottery and a summary paragraph included in the final publication.

The publication will focus on:

- Enhancing the understanding of the Upper Dean Street site in the medieval and post-medieval periods through documentary research.
- refining the chronology of the site through further documentary and cartographic analysis
- Setting the Upper Dean Street site into a historical and archaeological context by comparison with other sites in the city centre area.
- Assessing the environmental and geological factors that may have a bearing upon the deposits related to the watercourse.

It is proposed that the text will be submitted for inclusion in the Birmingham and Warwickshire Transactions.

11.0 TASK LIST

The task numbers below give the names of individuals responsible for the completion of the task, and the number of days allocated.

Task	Person	Days
Overall project management	RC	2
Integrate Archives/check phasing	HM	0.5
Draught figures for the site narrative	HM	0.5
Preparation of integrated site narrative	HM	2
Co-ordination of specialists	AH	0.2
Preparation of Illustrations	BR	1
THE POTTERY		
Record pottery and write summary paragraph	SR	1
final edit	SR	0.2
ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT		
Analysis and report writing. The Pollen	JG	1
Editing/corrections to specialist reports	RC	0.2
Archive research and preparation of first draft of discussion	HM	1
Editing of first draft (BUFAU)	RC	0.5
Corrections to first draft	HM	0.2
Corrections to illustrations	BR	0.3
Final proof reading	AJ	0.3
Final corrections to text/illustrations	HM	0.2
Submission of text	RC	0.5
Preparation of excavation and research archives	AH	0.5
Deposition of archive		0.5

MC- Marina Ciaraldi, RC-Richard Cuttler, JG-James Greg, AH- Annette Hancocks, AJ-Alex Jones, EM- Erica Macey, HM- Helen Martin, SR-Stephanie Rátkai, BR-Bryony Ryder.

12.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Farrho Developments Ltd. Thanks are due to Mike Hodder who monitored the site on behalf of Birmingham City Council and to Chris Cox of CgMs Consulting. Thanks are also due to Paul Beaumont and the groundworkers of Hutchinson Demolition for their help and co-operation on site and to Shaun Savage for the machining and assistance with the shoring. The work was supervised by Helen Martin with the assistance of Mary Duncan, Iannis Altsitzoglou and Derek

Moscrop. Helen Martin produced the written report which was edited by Richard Cuttler, who also monitored the site on behalf of BUFAU. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

13.0 REFERENCES

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CgMs 2001 *Archaeological Desk-based Assessment. Upper Dean Street, Birmingham*

CgMs 2002 *Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation*

Litherland S. and Watt S. 2000 *An Archaeological Desk Based Assessment of Land at Upper Dean Street, Birmingham City Centre.* BUFAU Report PN730

Mould, C. 1995 *A Preliminary Archaeological Assessment of the Area of Edgbaston Street, Pershore Street, Upper Dean Street and Moat Lane, Birmingham.* BUFAU Report PN354

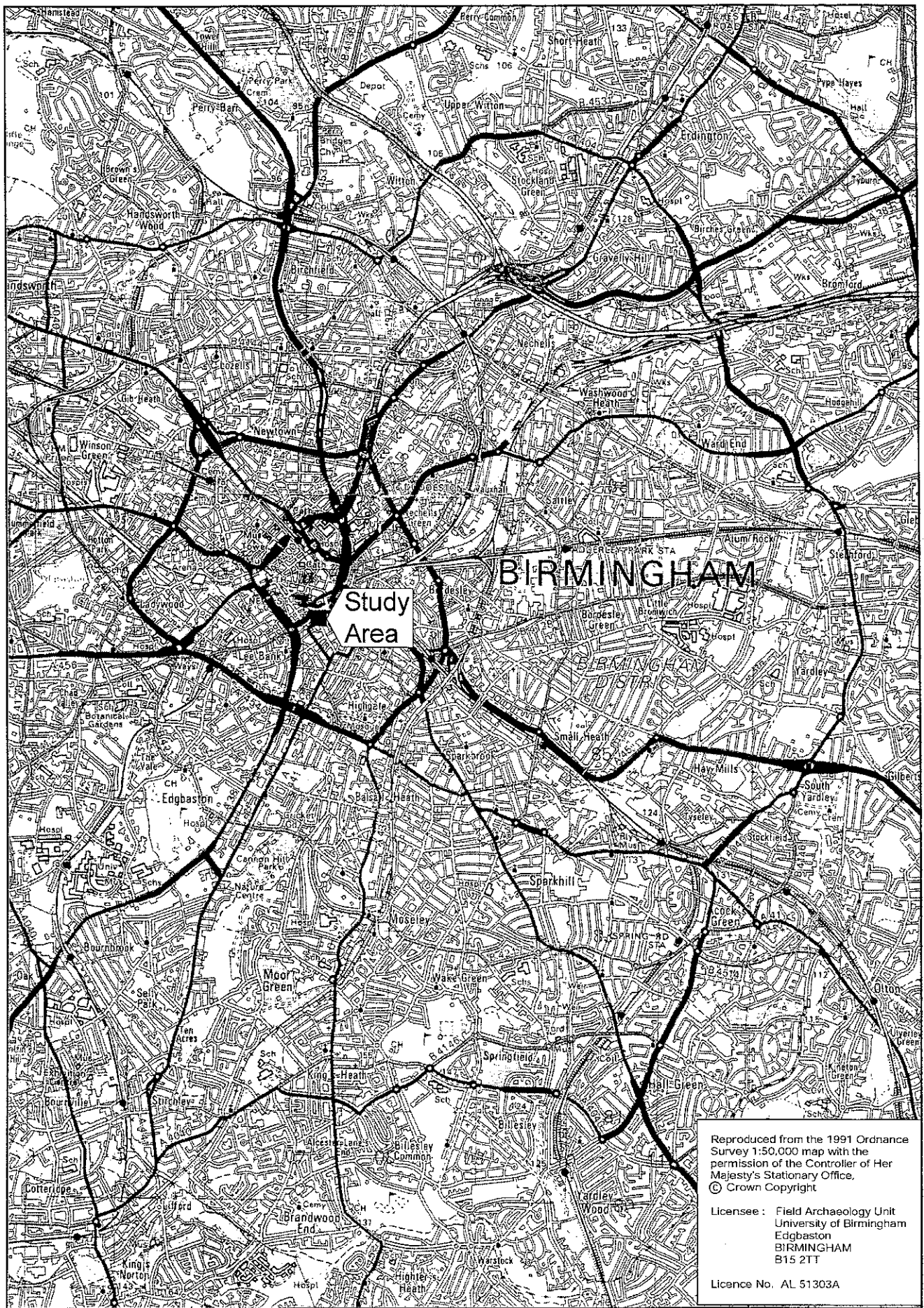


Fig.1 (Location Map)

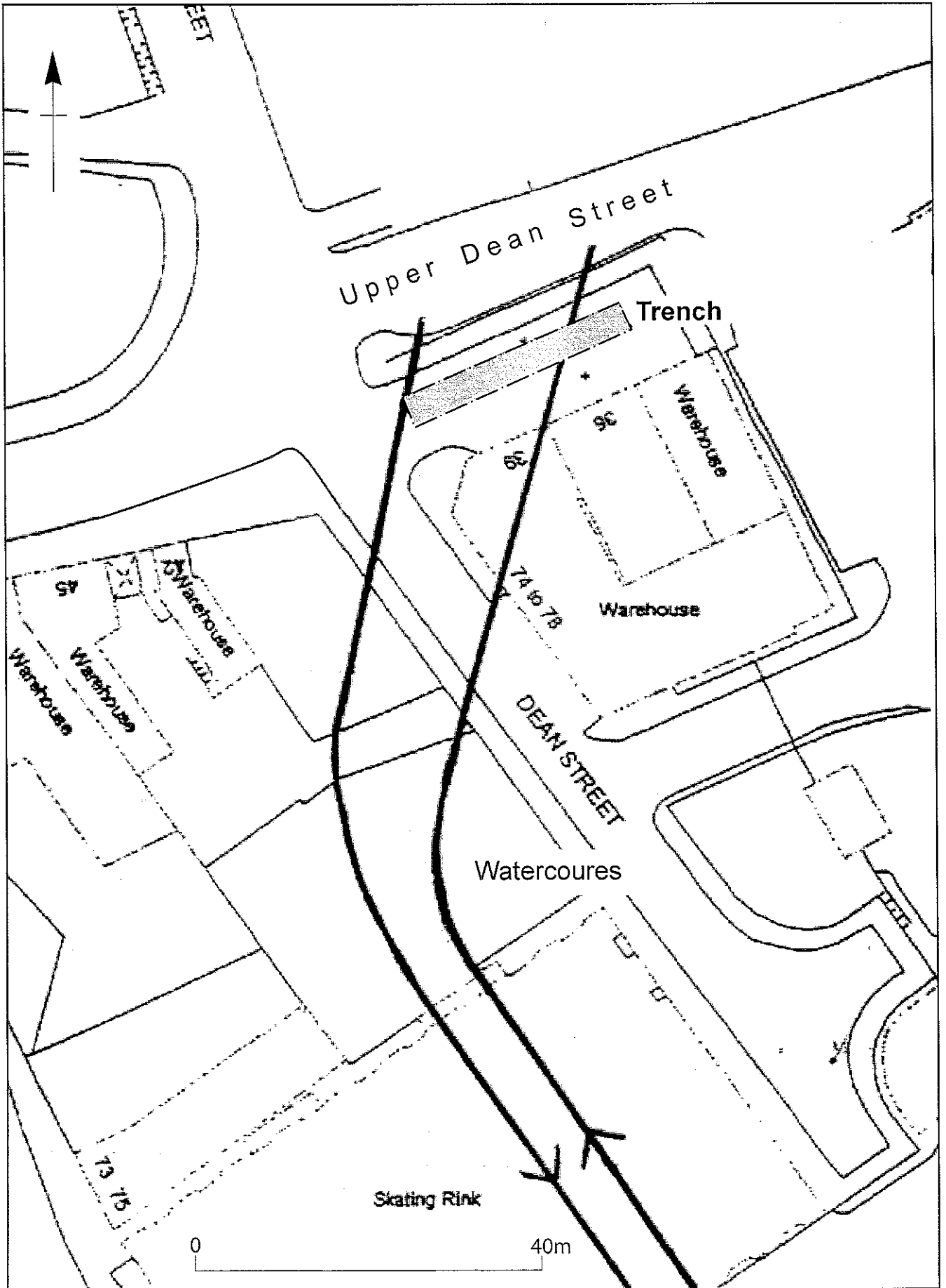


Fig.2

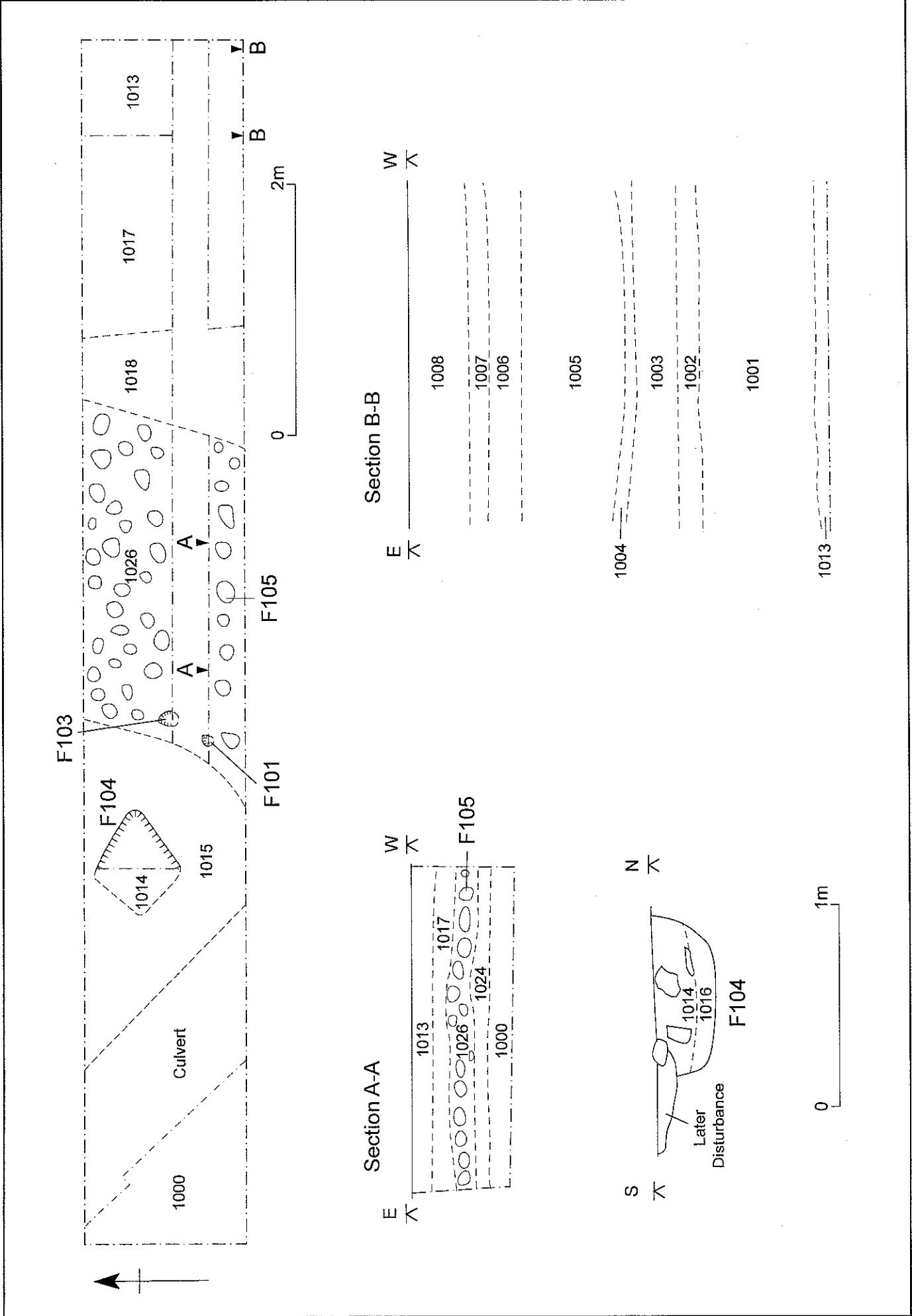


Fig.3

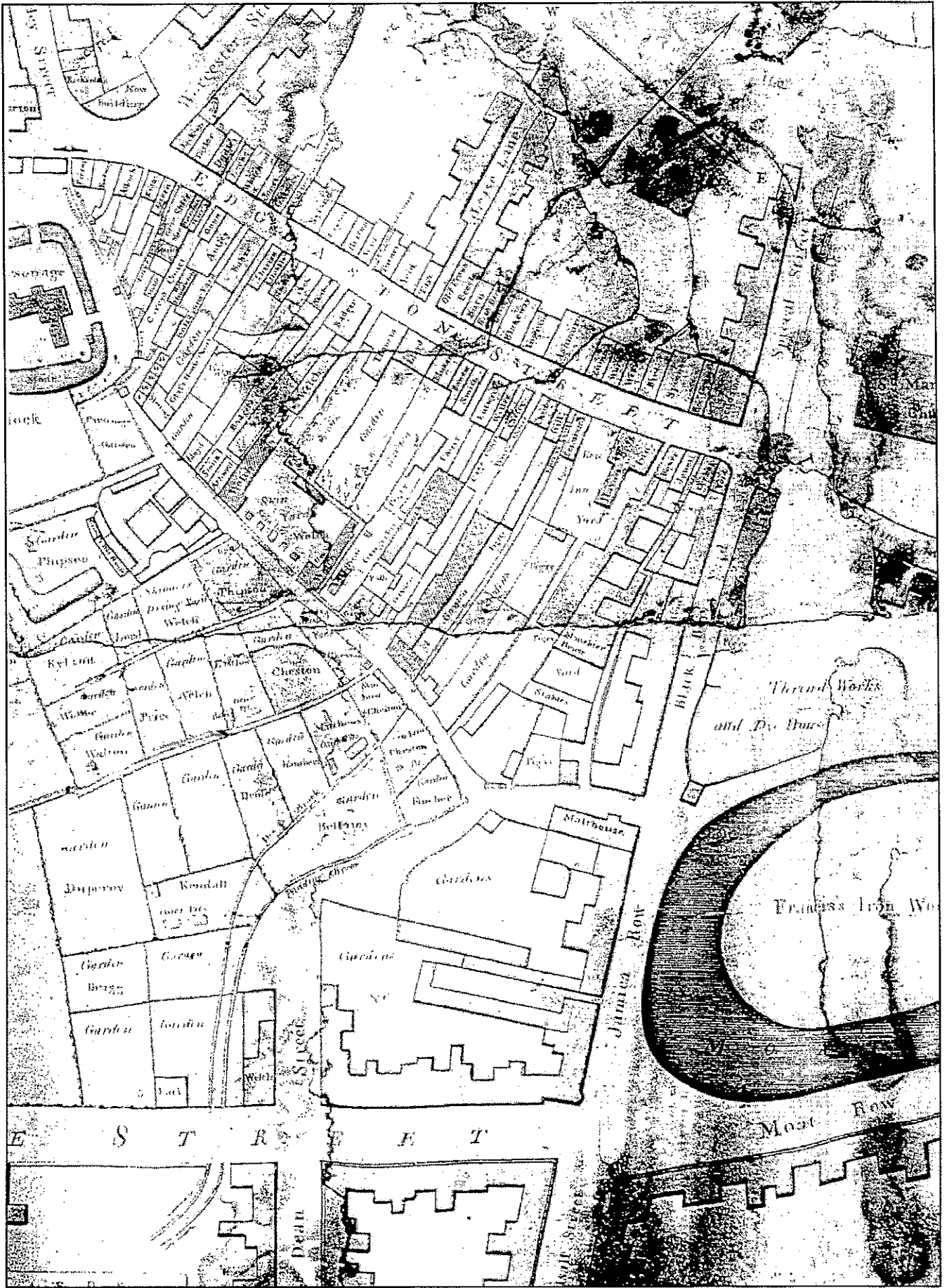


Fig.4

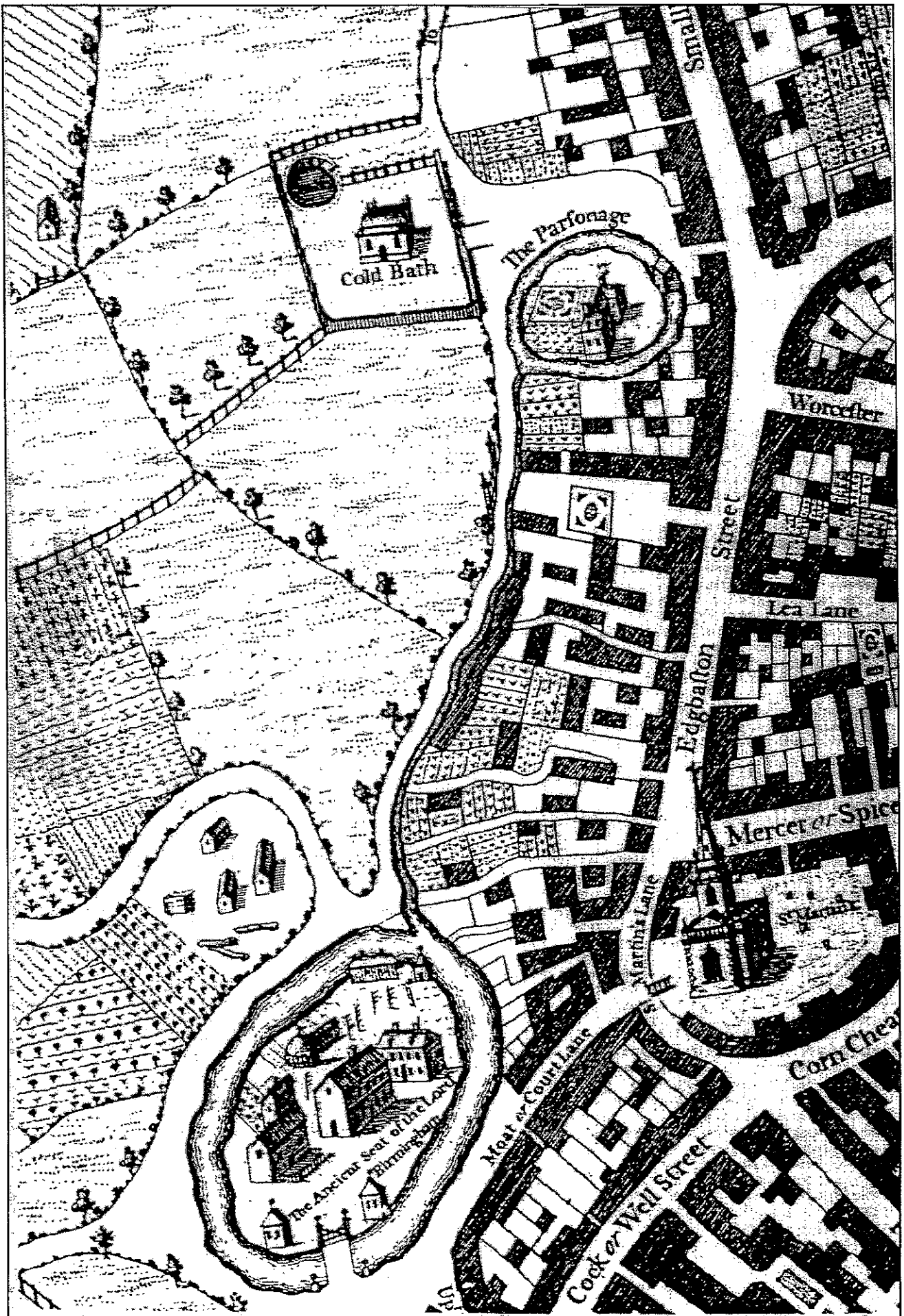


Fig.5



Plate 1

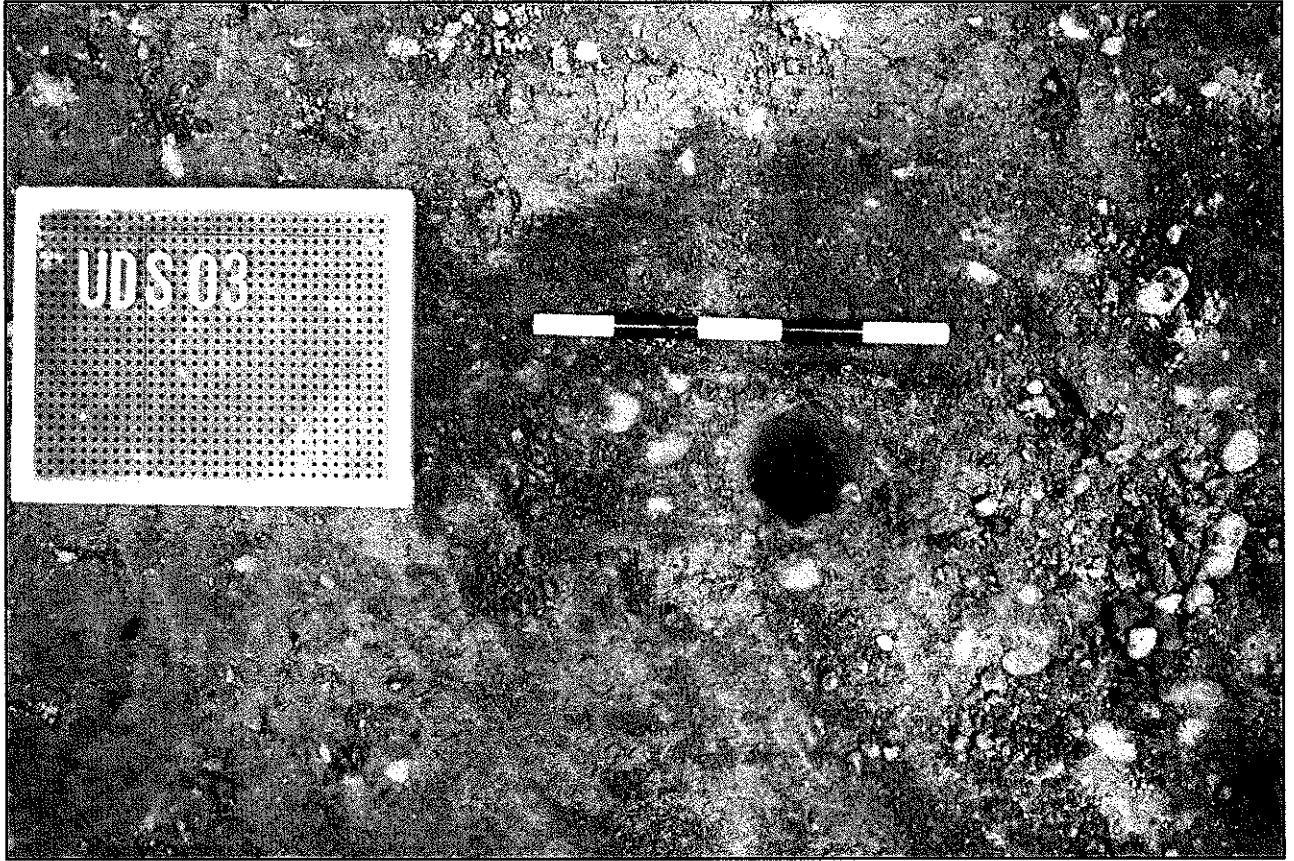


Plate 2



Plate 3