

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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**An archaeological watching brief
at Hartwell (Smithfield) Garage site,
Digbeth, Birmingham**

1997

by
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C/04621/95/FUL. *Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief*

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1.0 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out at the Hartwell (Smithfield) Garage in Digbeth, Birmingham (NGR SP 075865) between November 1996 and January 1997. The work was undertaken on behalf of Hartwell plc as a condition of planning permission for the construction of a new car showroom. All groundworks associated with the development were monitored by an archaeologist. However, no significant archaeological horizons were encountered, because groundworks did not penetrate beneath a depth of c.102.4m A.O.D. which was the height at which significant archaeological deposits were encountered during the evaluation of the site in 1996 (Litherland and Moscrop 1996).

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief, conducted at Hartwell (Smithfield) Garage in Digbeth, Birmingham, during the construction of a new car showroom. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Hartwell plc to monitor groundworks associated with the construction of a new car showroom. The archaeological watching brief was conducted in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs, a brief prepared by Birmingham City Council, included here as Appendix A, and a specification prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. This watching brief was undertaken in accordance with the Department of Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (1991).

3.0 Archaeological and Planning Background (Figures 1a and 1b)

The Hartwell (Smithfield) Garage is located in the district of Birmingham known as Digbeth, which is situated on the western side of the Rea valley, between Saint Martin's Church, the Bull Ring and the Rea river. In this vicinity, just above the valley bottom, the drift geology comprises of patches of sands and gravels which overlie an expanse of Mercia Mudstone, formerly known as Keuper Marl. While Digbeth is known to have lain within the medieval town of Birmingham and to have become a regionally significant centre of metal manufacture by the 16th century (Holt 1985), the precise date when this part of Birmingham began to be developed has remained open to speculation in the absence of firm historical evidence or previous archaeological investigation.

The Hartwell (Smithfield) Garage lies within the first zone of archaeological interest defined by a desk-based assessment (Litherland 1995). This assessment showed that the garage forecourt was once covered by a series of properties which developed along Digbeth High Street. A subsequent archaeological evaluation comprising the excavation of two trial trenches, demonstrated that

potentially significant archaeological deposits, dating to the 15th - 19th centuries, survived as 'islands' between areas of later disturbance, and included a waterlogged deposit containing preserved pieces of leather and wood (Litherland and Moscrop 1996). The evaluation also found structural evidence for a series of later 18th-and 19th-century brick buildings which were densely packed into the area before the garage was built in this century.

4.0 Objective

The ground beams and pile caps of the new building were designed to minimise the impact of the development upon archaeological deposits identified by the archaeological evaluation. However, it was recognised that some disturbance was nevertheless unavoidable, particularly at the interface between the latest intact archaeological deposits, which contained 15th - 18th century pottery, and the generalised spread of demolition material covering most of the site. Therefore, the objective of the archaeological watching brief was to monitor and record all below-ground disturbance resulting from the insertion of ground beams and pile caps for the new car showroom.

5.0 Method

All groundworks associated with the development were monitored on a regular basis by an appropriately qualified archaeologist. Any archaeological deposits or features identified during the watching brief were recorded by written description, scale drawing and photography, and any artefacts recovered.

6.0 The Archaeological Results (Figure 1b)

The limited dimensions of the building piles, combined with problems encountered on site with their excavation, precluded inspection of the pile-holes. Therefore, monitoring was confined to the inspection of the excavation of the concrete plinths and service trenches for the building. Prior to the insertion of concrete plinths along the western boundary of the new car showroom, a number of deposits of cellar infill were recorded. These deposits did not extend to the northwest corner. Groundworks along the eastern boundary of the new car showroom revealed a number of brick rubble deposits. A northeast-southwest aligned, machine-brick wall, and the possible remains of a second wall, on the same alignment, were recorded within the central length of this eastern boundary. Both walls had been inserted into already built-up ground. A layer of loose machine-brick rubble recorded at the southeastern corner of the new car showroom may represent cellar infill or demolition material. Further cellar infill, comprising machine-bricks, was recorded immediately to the east of the new car showroom, set back from the frontage of Oxford Street.

7.0 Discussion of the Archaeological Results

Overall, the strategy of archaeological mitigation proposed for the Hartwell garage site was successful in limiting damage to archaeological deposits to that caused by the insertion of the building piles. The watching brief was able to confirm that no significant archaeological deposits were damaged by the excavations for the concrete plinths and services, as these did not penetrate beneath a depth of 102.4m A.O.D. which was the height at which significant archaeological deposits were encountered by the 1996 evaluation (Litherland and Moscrop 1996). The location of the cellars equated with the known location of several, principally Victorian, buildings depicted on Ordnance Survey mapping which were demolished as the garage expanded this century.

8.0 References

- Hodder, M. 1996 Hartwell (Smithfield) Garage, 92-108 Digbeth, Birmingham. Planning application no. C/04621/95/FUL. *Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief as condition of planning permission.*
- Holt, R. 1985 *The Early History of the Town of Birmingham, 1166-1600.* Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, 30.
- Litherland, S. 1995 *An Archaeological Assessment of the Hartwell (Smithfield) Garage Site, Digbeth, Birmingham.* BUFAU Report No. 336.
- Litherland, S. and Moscrop, D. 1996 *Hartwell (Smithfield) Garage Site, Digbeth, Birmingham: An Archaeological Evaluation.* BUFAU Report No. 336.02

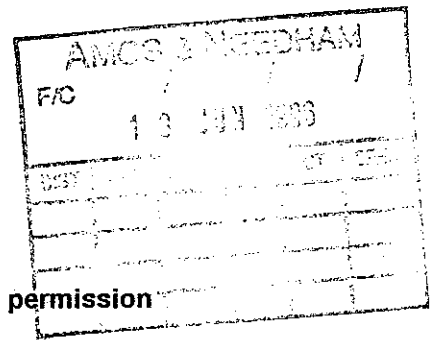
9.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Hartwell plc for sponsoring each phase of the archaeological provision for this project, from the initial desk-top study which led to an archaeological evaluation, and following on from this, the watching brief reported upon here. Further thanks are due Dr Mike Hodder, who monitored the archaeological work on behalf of Birmingham City Council. This report was written by Stephen Litherland with the assistance of Cathy Mould, and the figure was produced by Mark Breedon.

Appendix A

Hartwell (Smithfield) Garage, 92-108 Digbeth, Birmingham. Planning application no. C/04621/95/FUL. *Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief* as condition of planning permission.

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE
Hartwell(Smithfield) Garage, 92-108 Digbeth, Birmingham
Planning application no. C/04621/95/FUL
Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief as condition of planning permission



1. Summary

Redevelopment of the Hartwell(Smithfield) Garage site, 92-108 Digbeth, Birmingham, is likely to affect below-ground archaeological remains of medieval settlement and early industrial activities. This brief is for an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for the development, to observe and record any archaeological features exposed.

2. Site location and description

The application site is bounded by Digbeth, Oxford Street and Meriden Street(centre SP 075865). This site lies within one of the areas of potential archaeological importance identified by the City Council.

3. Planning background

Planning Application no C/4621/95/FUL is for the proposed construction of a car showroom on the Digbeth frontage, with an attached display canopy and surrounding car parking. Present site levels are to be retained. Because of the potential archaeological impact of the proposed development on below-ground archaeological remains, an assessment of its archaeological implications is required before the application is determined, in accordance with Policy 8.36 of the Council's Unitary Development Plan, and central government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, "Archaeology and Planning". A desk-based assessment was produced in March 1995 and was followed by a field evaluation in March 1996. Following the results of the assessment and evaluation, planning permission has been granted with a condition that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken at the developer's expense.

4. Archaeological background

The application site lies within the medieval town of Birmingham. A desk-based archaeological assessment of the whole of the Digbeth/Deritend area included the southern part of the application site, and a pre-application desk-based archaeological assessment of the Hartwell Smithfield site, in March 1995, defined five zones, two of which form the current application site. Zone I, the south half of the site, includes the Digbeth frontage, which may contain remains of medieval and later settlement and industry. Zone II, to the north, is likely to contain remains of the later industrial development of the area, including a gas works. Cellars are likely to have disturbed below-ground archaeological remains along the street frontage. The archaeological field evaluation consisted of two trenches in the front part of the site. In both trenches there was a layer containing pottery of 15th to 18th century date, and under this in one of the trenches there was a waterlogged deposit containing leather, fragments of wood, animal bone and roof tile.

5. Requirements for work

The foundations for the new structures will consist of ground beams and piling. This design will minimise damage to the below-ground archaeological deposits revealed in the field evaluation, but the ground beams and pile caps will penetrate the layer containing 15th to 18th century pottery and the piling will penetrate all deposits above undisturbed subsoil. It is important that disturbance to archaeological deposits is observed and recorded, therefore the Council's standard planning condition PLB825, ARC-OBS is being applied, requiring archaeological observation and recording during development.

6. Stages of work

A suitably skilled and qualified archaeological contractor is to be on site while groundworks are being undertaken. All groundworks are to be observed and any archaeological features or deposits exposed are to be recorded by written description, drawing and photography. No excavation is to be undertaken beyond cleaning exposed deposits for better definition. Artifacts are to be retrieved as they are revealed during construction operations or cleaning.

All finds are to be cleaned, marked and bagged at the end of the watching brief, and any remedial conservation work undertaken.

7. Staffing

The archaeological watching brief is to be carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct, Standards, Guidelines and practices of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and all staff are to be suitably qualified and experienced for their roles in the project. It is recommended that the project be under the direct supervision of a Member or Associate Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

8. Written Scheme of Investigation

Potential contractors should present a Written Scheme of Investigation which details methods and staffing. It is recommended that the proposal be submitted to the City Council's Planning Archaeologist before a contractor is commissioned, to ensure that it meets the requirements of the brief.

9. Monitoring

The archaeological watching brief must be carried out to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning and Architecture, Birmingham City Council, and will be monitored on his behalf by the Planning Archaeologist.

10. Reporting

The results of the archaeological watching brief are to be presented as an analytical written report, containing appropriate illustrations a summary of finds, and a copy of this brief. A copy of the report must be sent to the Planning Archaeologist.

11. Archive deposition

The written, drawn and photographic records of the archaeological watching brief must be deposited with an appropriate repository within a reasonable time of completion, following consultation with the Planning Archaeologist. The site owner will be encouraged to deposit any finds with Birmingham City Museums.

12. Publication

The written report will become publicly accessible, as part of the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record, within six months of completion. The contractor must submit a short summary report for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology*.

DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE
BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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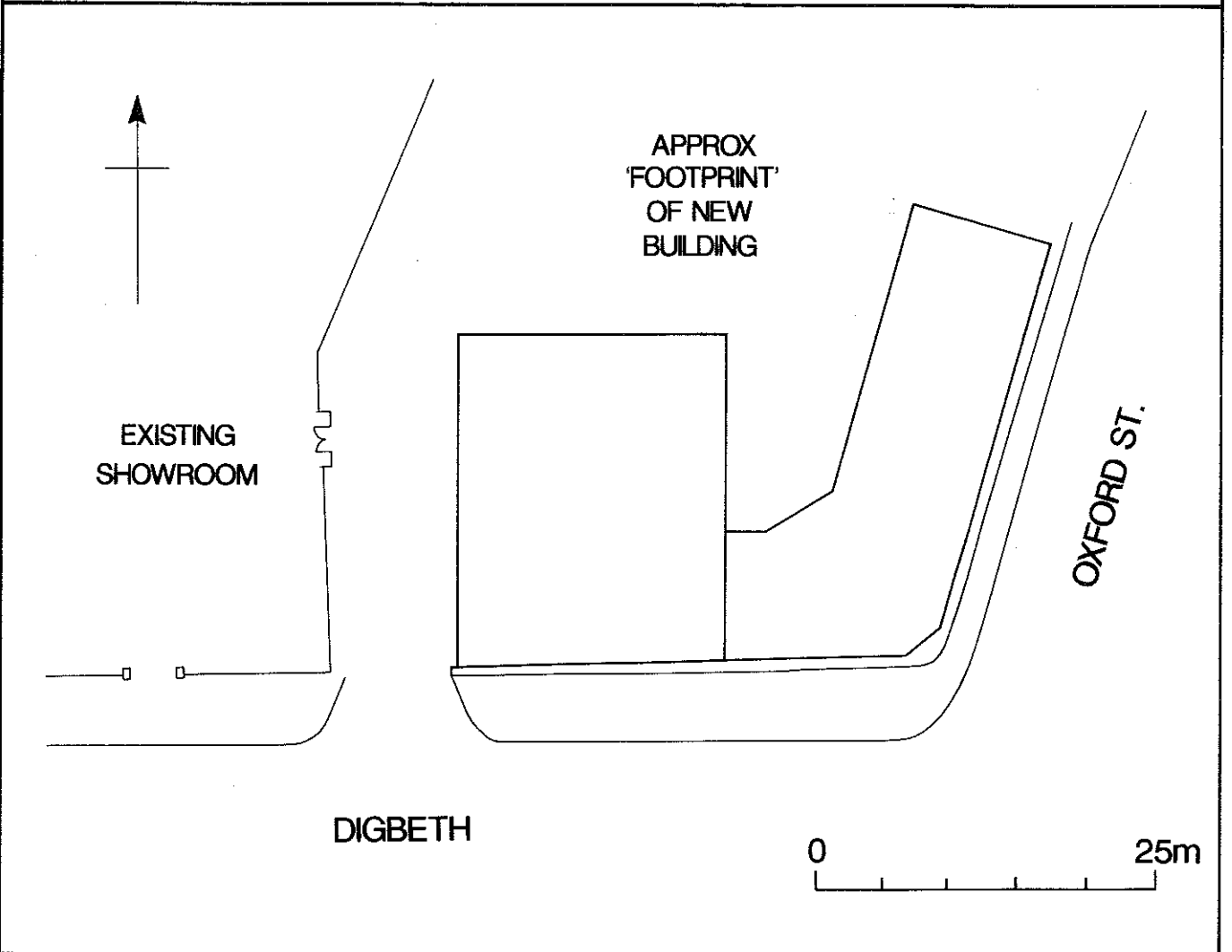


Fig.1