

**Masshouse Circus,
Birmingham City Centre:
An archaeological watching
brief**

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**Masshouse Circus, Birmingham City Centre:
An archaeological watching brief**

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out at Masshouse Circus in Birmingham City Centre (NGR SP4061 2876), during groundworks for a new highway. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit undertook the work on behalf of Birmingham City Council Transportation Department in January and February 2001. Historical sources indicated that the new road cut the east side of the burial ground of St. Bartholomew's Chapel that was reputedly cleared and levelled some time after the Second World War and later became the Masshouse Circus car park. After the recovery of disarticulated human bones, the watching brief continued under the provision of a Home Office Licence with all excavated material being sieved. Some coffin furniture and a few broken gravestones were also recovered, but no intact burials or grave-cuts were identified. The results of the watching brief indicate that the graveyard was cleared reasonably effectively after the war, but that a quantity of human remains, possibly already disarticulated as a result of disturbance from earlier interments, was not removed.

1.0 Introduction

This report outlines the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during groundworks associated with highway works in Masshouse Circus car park, alongside Bartholomew Row, Birmingham City Centre (Fig.1; NGR SP4061 2876). The route of a new north-south aligned road cut the east side of the former burial ground of St. Bartholomew's Chapel, identified from 18th -and 19th -century maps. Accordingly, in response to advice from Dr. Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit rapidly undertook a watching brief between 22nd January and 23rd February 2001 on behalf of Birmingham City Council Transportation Department. The watching brief followed the guidelines set down in the *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

2.0 Site location (Fig. 2)

Masshouse Circus car park is situated in Birmingham City Centre and is bordered to the east by Bartholomew Row, to the south by Albert Street, to the west by Masshouse Lane and to the north by Chapel Street. The new road runs down the eastern side of the car park turning westwards towards the south-east corner of the car park. The area affected was approximately 30m wide. The depth of excavation varied between 0.5m to the north and 2m to the south.

articulated burials within the area of the watching brief, the limitations of the present watching brief mean that the possibility of some interments having been missed elsewhere within the burial ground remains. In addition, there have been two distinct episodes of clearance, one during the war and the other after. It is therefore possible that interments were missed in and around the church, and that foundations and vaults within the building may also be preserved.

9.0 Recommendations

In the light of the knowledge gained from the watching brief within part of St. Bartholomew's burial ground it is possible to offer some recommendations concerning the likely form of archaeological response to any development proposals within the rest of the area. At a minimum, any clearance of the site would require total sieving in order to ensure that human remains were recovered. Clearance would have to take place within the provisions of a Home Office Licence and would probably require provision for a further archaeological watching brief in case articulated remains or intact grave cuts were encountered. There is also the potential that the foundations of St. Bartholomew's Chapel and interments inside may have survived. Perhaps, the most appropriate response here is for archaeological evaluation to be commissioned prior to any development of this site, to understand the nature, extent and preservation of the church.

Acknowledgements

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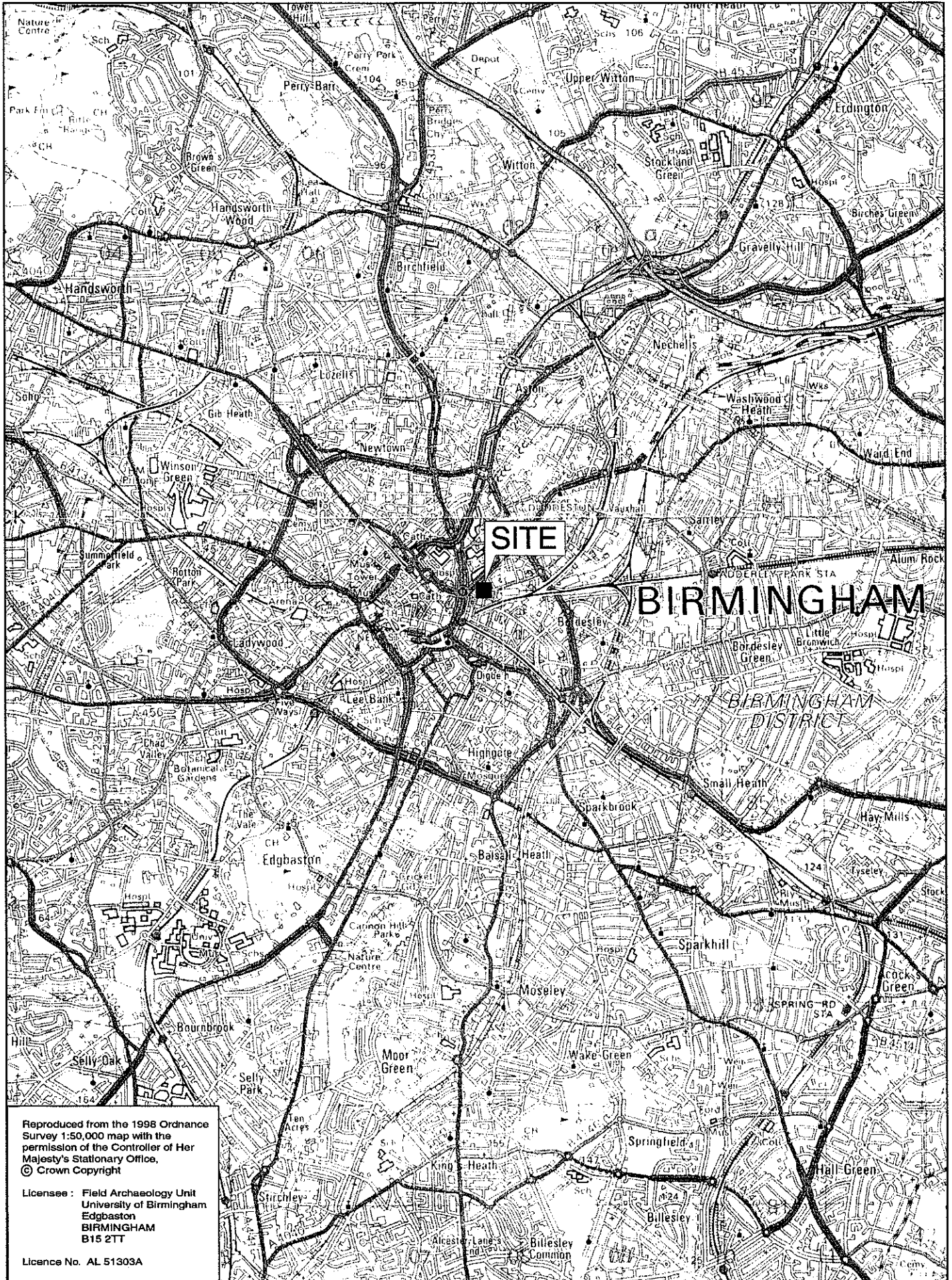


Fig.1

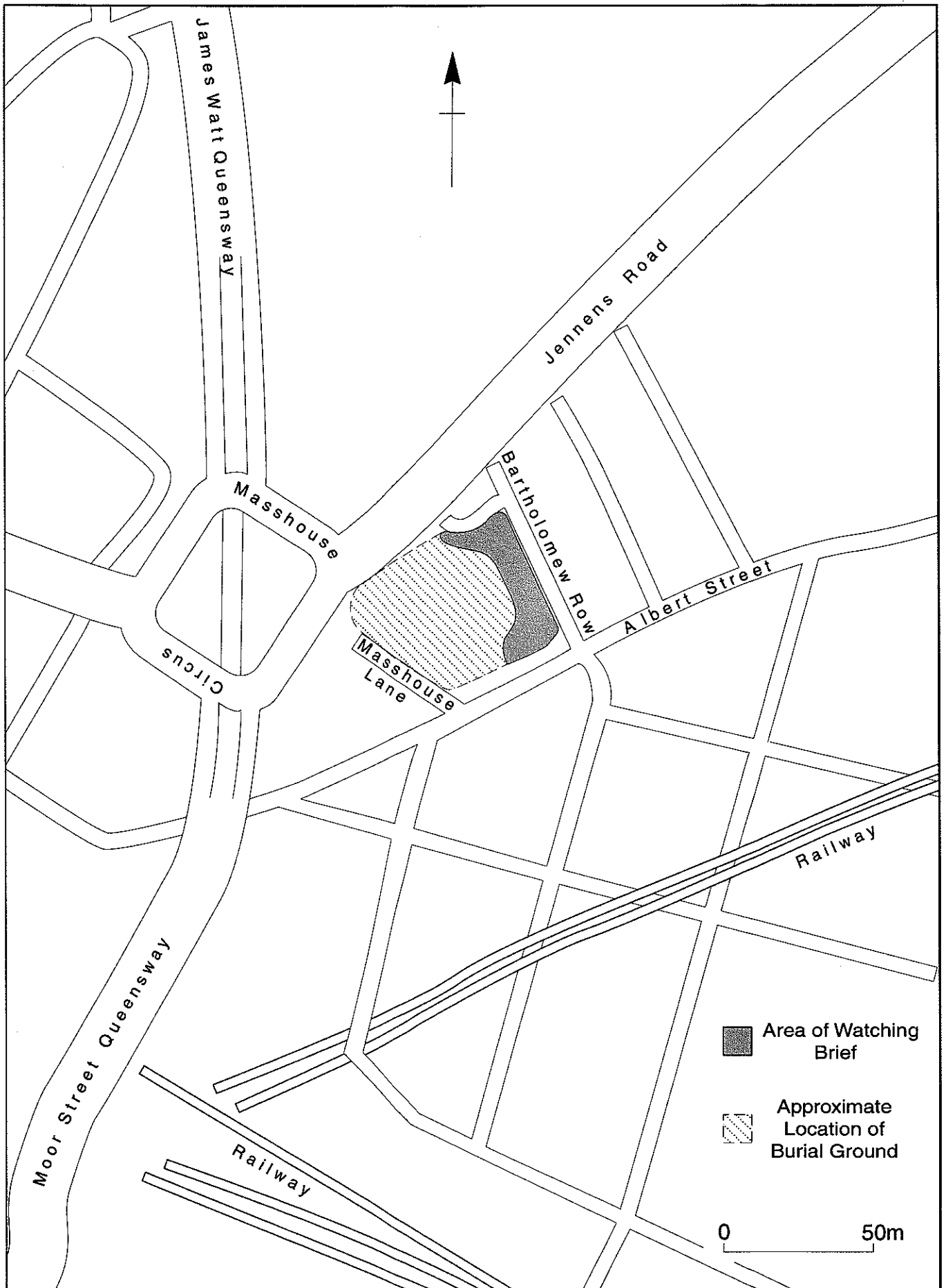


Fig.2