

**Town Hall, Chamberlain Square,  
Birmingham:  
archaeological observation and  
recording 2003**

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by  
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**1.0 Summary**

*Birmingham Archaeology carried out archaeological observation and recording at Birmingham Town Hall, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham City Centre (SMR 01342, NGR SP 0663 8685), in October 2003, during works associated with the refurbishment of the Town Hall. The work was commissioned by Urban Design, Birmingham City Council. The monitoring revealed limited evidence of the construction of the Town Hall but no other significant archaeological features or deposits.*

**2.0 Introduction**

This report describes the results of an archaeological observation and recording carried out in October 2003, during works associated with the installation of air-conditioning ducting in the Town Hall. A program of archaeological observation and recording was recommended by Birmingham City Council. This followed the requirements of a brief by Birmingham City Council (BCC 2003) and a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (Birmingham Archaeology 2003) and approved Birmingham City Council.

**3.0 Site location**

The site is located at the north-west end of the Town Hall within Chamberlain Square, Birmingham City Centre (NGR SP 0663 8685, Fig. 1).

**4.0 Background and objectives**

Birmingham Town Hall (SMR 01342) is a Grade 1 listed building. It was designed by Joseph Hanson, inventor of the Hanson cab for the Birmingham Triennial Music Festival. It opened in 1834. Based on the Roman temple of Castor and Pollux it was made from Selly Oak brick and faced with Anglesey Marble. Charles Edge was responsible for later renovations in the 1860's.

The Town Hall is currently undergoing a program of refurbishment and renovation. As part of the groundworks associated with this several trenches were dug, associated with the provision of air-conditioning ducting for the building. It was expected that the arches of the building would be exposed at basement level, in one of the trenches. The aim of the archaeological work was to record the arches and to attempt to identify any phases of construction present. A record of any other below ground deposits was also made in order to contribute to the understanding of the history and significance of the site.

## 5.0 Method

The groundworks were monitored by a qualified archaeologist. Stratigraphic sequences were recorded with contextual information supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs. This forms the site archive, which will be deposited with Birmingham Museum within a reasonable time of the completion of the project, following consultation with the Conservation Group, Birmingham City Council.

## 6.0 Results

Three trenches (T1, T1A and T1B, Fig. 2) were excavated during the period of archaeological monitoring. Trench 1 was excavated parallel with and adjacent to the north-west façade of the Town Hall. Trenches 1A and 1B were excavated perpendicular to Trench 1 and were designed to locate the southern exterior wall of an underground car park located below Chamberlain Square. No finds were recovered from any of the trenches.

### Trench 1

This trench was c.17m long by c.1.2m wide. The trench was excavated to maximum depth of 1.95m at the south-west end. Elsewhere the presence of manholes, services and concrete limited the depth of excavation. A sondage at the south-west end of the trench was excavated to a depth of 1.95m, below the present ground surface. Here, in the north-west facing section of the sondage, the brick basement wall [1005] of the building was revealed. Wall 1005 was made of clamped bricks in English garden wall bond. The base of the basement wall was not exposed but it was at least 1.30m deep.

Above 1005 was the exterior façade, which was of stone masonry construction [1003], and this extended to a depth of 0.65m below the present ground surface. In places this was supplemented by rough agglomerated concrete [1004], presumed to be part of a phase of repair. Abutting 1005 was a red clayey sand fill [1002], this was overlain by a thin layer of hardcore [1001]. Laid on top of 1001, was the present paved ground surface [1000]. This stratigraphy was disturbed by services exiting below a central doorway and two large manholes just to the north-east of the doorway. To the north-east of the manholes was a layer of concrete at a depth of c.0.1m below ground level.

### Trench 1A and 1B

These trenches were both c.12.50m long x 1m wide and were designed to establish service locations and the location of the exterior wall of an underground car park.

In Trench 1A the earliest deposits which were revealed were concrete and tarmac surfaces [1006], at least 0.35m deep, at a depth of 0.6m below present ground level. At the north-west end of the trench, concrete was encountered at 0.10m below the current ground surface and excavation ceased at this level. 1006 was sealed by a similar red clayey sand [1007] to that recorded in Trench 1. This was overlain by a layer of hardcore [1001] and the paved surface [1000] recorded in Trench 1.

Trench 1B followed the line of a service trench and no archaeological information was gained.

## **7.0 Discussion**

The brick basement wall of the building was revealed during the archaeological observation. No evidence of phases of construction was identified and no below ground evidence of the arches of the Town Hall was recorded. Evidence of repair to the masonry of the exterior façade of the building was noted.

The evidence from the observations in Trench 1A north-west of the Town Hall appear to suggest that no significant archaeological deposits exist at depths of less than 0.6m below the present ground surface, at this part of Chamberlain Square. The deposits, which were recorded, are probably made-ground and footway/ road surfaces associated with the late 20<sup>th</sup> century remodelling of Chamberlain Square.

## **8.0 Acknowledgements**

The watching brief was commissioned by Peter Gibson, Urban Design, Birmingham City Council. Thanks are due to Paul Greaves of Wates Construction for his assistance. Ioannis Alsitoglou and Chris Hewitson, who also wrote this report, carried out the fieldwork. The project was managed by Laurence Jones, who edited the report. The illustrations were prepared by John Halsted.

## **9.0 References**

Birmingham Archaeology 2003, *Written Scheme of Investigation. Archaeological Observation and Recording. Town Hall, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham.*

Birmingham City Council 2003, *Birmingham Town Hall, Chamberlain Square: brief for archaeological observation and recording during development.* Birmingham City Council Planning.

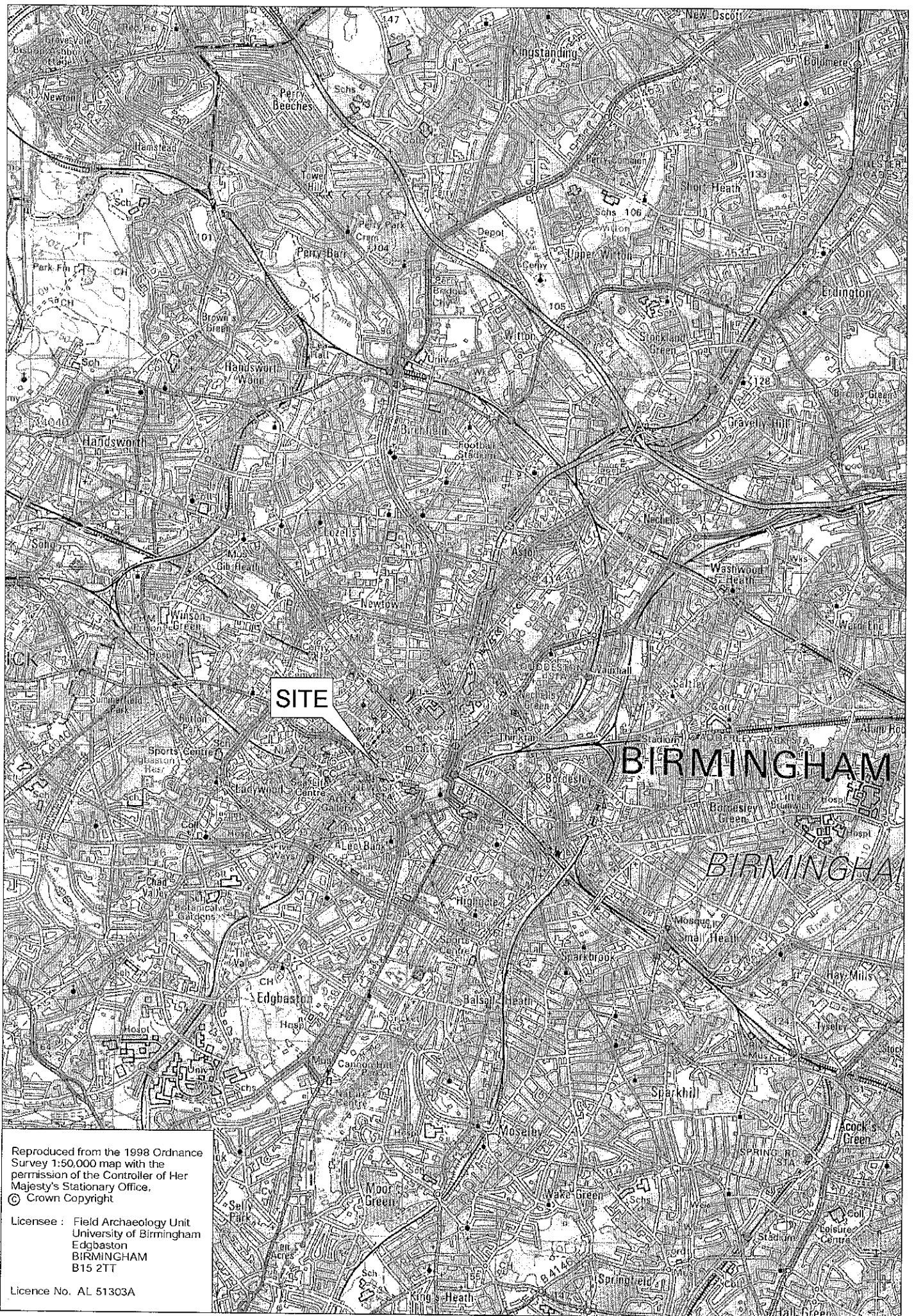


Fig.1

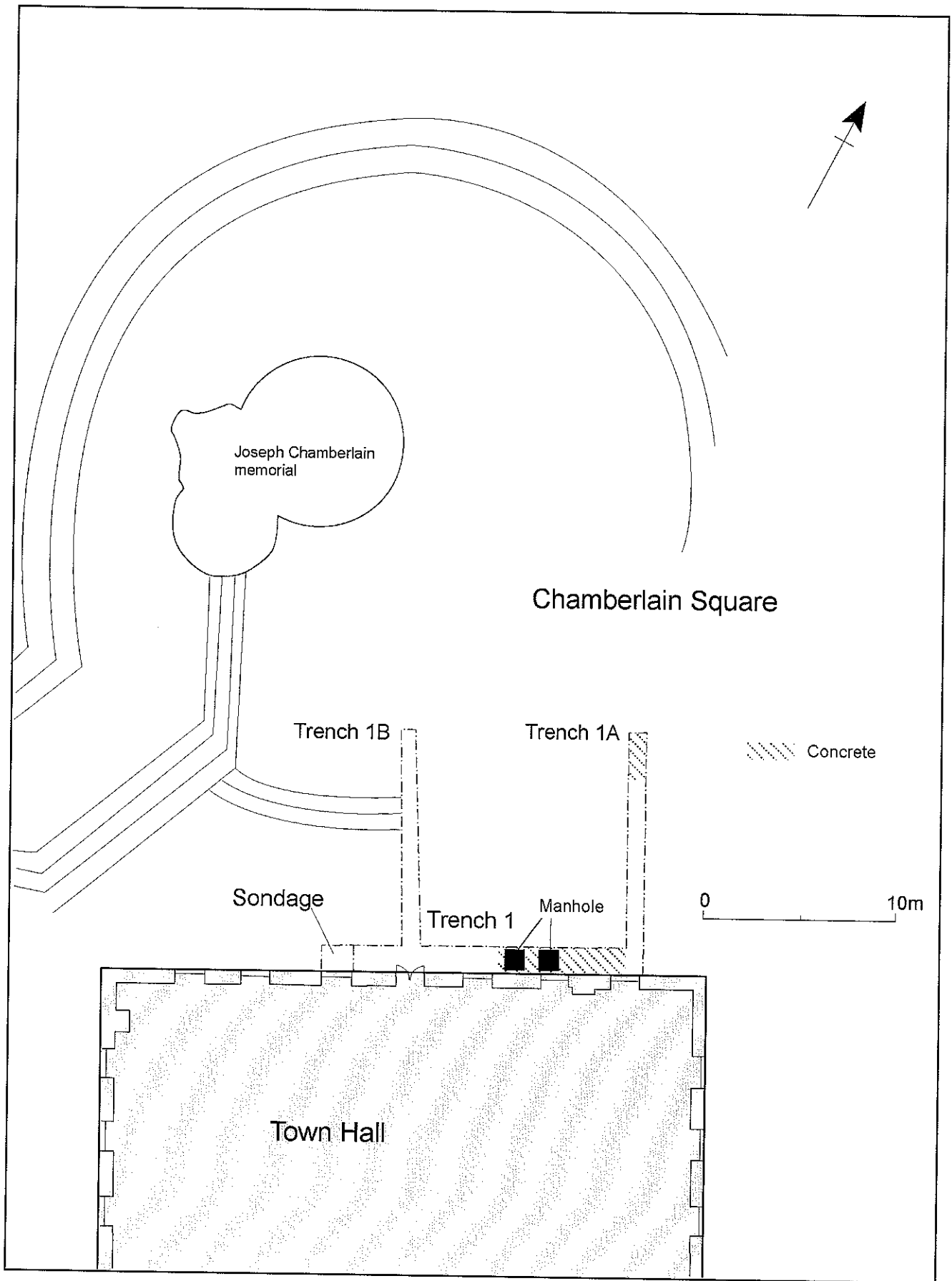


Fig.2