Floodgate Street, Digbeth, Birmingham:

an archaeological evaluation

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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Floodgate Street, Digbeth, Birmingham: an archaeological evaluation

by
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1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out in August 2001 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in advance of proposed redevelopment of a site at Floodgate Street in Digbeth, Birmingham City Centre (NGR SP 407800/286380). The work was commissioned by Nicol Thomas Limited on behalf of Marcity Developments. A previous desk-based assessment had identified the development site as part of a zone of potential archaeological survival, and development of the site was likely to affect below-ground archaeological remains. These remains may include features and deposits dating from medieval period and remains of later settlement and industry, especially waterlogged deposits associated with the River Rea.

Trial-trenching showed survival of a 17th-century waterlogged deposit in Trench 1b, at a depth of 1.6m below the modern tarmac surface. A similar deposit was revealed in Trench 3 at a depth of 1.8m below the modern tarmac surface. Sandstone blocks reused as the footings for a brick wall were uncovered in Trench 2, contemporary with a 19th-century deposit. The remainder of the recorded deposits and features consisted of 19th-century cellars, which had been backfilled in the 20th -century, and of services and their associated trenches. Despite major disturbance by cellaring, this archaeological evaluation demonstrated the survival of archaeological deposits and features. Because of the depth of the surviving deposits, further evaluation of the area may be required by Birmingham City Council.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of archaeological fieldwork undertaken at a site at Floodgate Street, Digbeth, Birmingham City Centre *(NGR SP 407800/286380, Fig. 1).* in August 2001. The work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit and commissioned by Nicol Thomas Limited on behalf of Marcity developments, to provide archaeological information in advance of proposed development of the site. An earlier desk-based assessment (Watt, 2001) had identified the development site as being part of a zone of potential archaeological survival, and that development of the site was likely to affect below-ground archaeological remains. In line with government guidance and the City Council's planning policies, there was a requirement, therefore, for an archaeological evaluation to establish the nature and extent of below-ground archaeological survival within the area of development. A site monitoring meeting was held with Dr Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist, Birmingham City Council on 9th August.

The archaeological evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation (Institute of Field

Archaeologists 1994), a Brief prepared by Birmingham City Council (Hodder 2001) and a specification prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU 2001). This evaluation conformed to Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of Environment 1991).

The site archive is currently held at BUFAU. It will be deposited with the appropriate repository, within a reasonable time of the completion of the evaluation, subject to the approval of the landowner.

3.0 Location (Fig. 2)

The proposed development site is bounded by Floodgate Street on the southeast, Milk Street on the northwest, Digbeth High Street to the southwest and Moore's Row to the northeast. The street block is referred to as the Site. The Site lies to the west of the River Rea and Deritend Bridge, and currently comprises a mix of 19th and 20th-century buildings, two of which are statutorily listed, and car parking areas.

4.0 Archaeological background

An archaeological desk-based assessment of the Digbeth Economic Regeneration Area was carried out in 1995 (Litherland 1995). This assessment covered the Digbeth/High Street Deritend and High Street Bordesley frontage, and noted that the area was susceptible to flooding, due to its proximity to the River Rea. This had led to piecemeal development on the site and a raising of the ground level in order to facilitate building. Digbeth itself was also raised to create an artificial causeway crossing the two original courses of the River Rea, one of which followed the line of the present Milk Street. Remains of this causeway may still exist on the site. The past raising of ground levels could have led to the good survival of below-ground archaeological deposits, as well as the survival of environmental evidence from deposits in the former watercourse along Milk Street. A desk-based assessment for the Floodgate Street site (Watt 2001) was carried out, and found evidence for the existence of a tanyard on the site from at least the 18th century, and possibly as early as the 15th century. In the early 17th century, two pubs (demolished in the early 20th century) stood on the Digbeth frontage, and forges existed on the site by the late 19th -century. The desk-based assessment noted that 'islands' of archaeological deposits were likely to survive across the site, particularly in areas where no cellaring existed.

The desk-based assessment (Watt 2001) defined three zones on the site:
Zone A consists of the surviving 19th -century buildings at the Milk Street/Digbeth corner.
Zone B consists of the Digbeth frontage and the southern part of the Floodgate Street frontage. This area may contain 'islands' of archaeological deposits. Remains of the tanning industry and of medieval and post-medieval buildings may exist in this zone.
Zone C consists of a car park. This area may contain remains of the tanning industry.

5.0 Objectives

The main objective of the archaeological evaluation was to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains in advance of development. In particular, the aim was to assess the extent to which archaeological deposits had been affected by cellars constructed in the 19th -century. The evaluation aimed to provide information to allow the formulation of a mitigation scheme for further excavation in advance of development, where appropriate.

6.0 Methodology

Three trenches, 2m in width, were excavated within the Site (Fig. 2), representing a 5% sample of the total currently open area of the site. Trench 1, a T-shaped trench, 17.5m in length, was excavated along the frontage of Digbeth High Street and was positioned to test for survival of a causeway, evidence of medieval/post-medieval buildings at the head of the plot, and tanning or other activity behind. Trench 2, 4m in length, was excavated parallel to Milk Street to assess survival of waterlogged deposits within the former course of one of the channels of the River Rea. Trench 3, 15m in length, was excavated at right angles to Floodgate Street, parallel to the back of the warehouse now fronting Floodgate Street. This was positioned to test for remains associated with the tanning industry, identified here from documentary sources.

The layers of modern overburden were removed with the use of a JCB excavator, under archaeological supervision, to a maximum depth of 2m. The natural subsoil was not reached in any of the trenches, due to the depth of the overlying deposits. Subsequent excavation of archaeological deposits was carried out by hand and finds were recovered. Recording was carried out using pre-printed *pro forma* record cards for contexts and features, supplemented by plans (at 1:20 and 1:50), sections (at 1:10 and 1:20), and monochrome print and colour slide photography.

7.0 Results

Trench 1a (Fig. 3)

Trench 1a was 7.5m long and was excavated on a northeast-southwest alignment, forming a T-shape with Trench 1b. It was located in the disused car park on the corner of Digbeth High Street and Floodgate Street. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.5m.

A red brick cellar wall (3029), aligned northwest-southeast was encountered at a depth of 0.6m. The base of the wall was not reached within the trench. The earliest infill of the cellar, a brown silty clay (3030), was reached at a depth of 1m. This contained fragments of brick and 19th-century pottery. Overlying 3030 was a secondary infill of rubble (3031) which contained brick, tile, ash, clinker and mortar. A red brick wall (3028), aligned northeast-southwest, and only seen in parts of the northwest-southeast

facing section, was built on top of cellar fills 3030 and 3031. Sealing 3030 and abutting 3028 was a layer of brick rubble (3027) up to 0.60m thick. Wall 3028 and layer 3027 were sealed by two layers of crushed stone (3026 and 3025) forming the car park surface.

Trench 1b (Fig. 4)

Trench 1b was 10m long and was excavated on a northwest-southeast alignment, forming a T-shape with Trench 1a. It was located in the disused car park on the corner of Digbeth High Street and Floodgate Street. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 2m

The earliest context recorded in the trench was located at the northwest end of the trench, at a depth of 1.60m below the present ground surface. It was a dark black clay-silt waterlogged deposit (3042), at least 0.85m thick, containing fragments of brick, cobbles and two sherds of 17th-century pottery - a coarseware jar sherd and a coarseware bowl sherd (Ratkai, *pers. comm.)*. The base of this deposit was not reached. Deposit 3042 was cut by the earliest wall in the trench, a red brick wall (3043), on a northwest-southeast alignment. Wall 3043 was encountered at a depth of 2.0m below the present ground surface. It was 1m long and at least 0.2m deep, although the base was not reached.

Built over waterlogged deposit 3042 was a series of red brick walls, two walls (3024 and 3033) were aligned northeast-southwest, and one wall (3032) was aligned northwest-southeast, and ran the length of the trench. At the southeast end of the trench a small square brick cellar (3021) was uncovered. These walls formed a series of cellars, which had subsequently been infilled. Sealing 3042 at the northwest end of the trench, the earliest cellar fill was a red clay (3041) which appeared to have been deliberately laid. Overlying 3041 were three consecutive layers of silt and rubble (3040, 3039 and 3038). The cellar at the southwestern end of the trench was infilled by a layer of grey silt and cobbles (3037) which was overlain by a grey silty clay layer (3036). A layer of brick and rubble (3035) overlay 3036 and in turn this was sealed by a concrete floor (3034). A brick and rubble layer (3032) overlay 3034. The small square cellar 3021 was filled with loose bricks (3022). The entire trench was capped by two layers of crushed stone (3026 and 3025) which formed the car park surface.

Trench 2 (Fig. 5)

Trench 2 was 4m long and was excavated on a northeast-southwest alignment. It was located in the northern corner of the South Birmingham College car park. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.85m.

The earliest features recorded in the trench were two northeast-southwest aligned walls (3055 and 3047). Brick wall 3055 was 1.3m below the present ground level, and was only visible in the northwest-facing section. Its base was not reached. Wall 3047 was located, 1.7m below the present ground surface and was at least 0.40m deep, although the base was not reached. It was made of three large sandstone blocks with a single course of red bricks bonded to the top of the blocks. It is assumed that the blocks were reused as footings for a brick wall. Abutting walls 3055 and 3047 was

a dark brown soft clayey silt (3054) which contained brick fragments, tile and sherds of late 18th -century and 19th -century pottery.

Overlying 3054 was a soft brown sandy silt layer (3053) in the southeast part of the trench and a reddish sandy silt (3065) in the northwest part of the trench. The precise relationship between 3053 and 3065 was not established. A small posthole (3064) was cut through layer 3065. A pipe trench also cut layers 3065 and 3053 and was filled with a red sand (3051) and a dark brown silt and rubble deposit (3050). Layer 3065 was overlain by the remains of a cobbled surface (3056, not illustrated in section). Cobbled surface 3056 had been truncated and terminated within the trench to the southeast and extended beyond the trench to the northwest. Sealing these deposits were two levelling layers (3049 and 3048) containing brick, ash and clinker. The trench was sealed by a layer of crushed stone (3046), tarmac (3045) and asphalt (3044).

Trench 3 (Fig. 6)

Trench 3 was 15m long and was excavated on a northwest-southeast alignment. It was located in the South Birmingham College car park, parallel to the warehouse fronting onto Floodgate Street. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.2m.

The earliest deposit in the trench was a black waterlogged silty deposit (3006), at least 0.40m thick, at the northwest end of the trench. This was located at a depth of 1.80m below the present ground surface and contained fragments of brick and tile. The base of this deposit was not reached. Deposit 3006 was overlain by a layer of brick and rubble (3005).

The trench was split into two by a northeast-southwest orientated brick cellar wall (3018). A northwest-southeast orientated brick cellar wall (3013) was bonded with 3018 on the northwestern side. Filling the cellar was a layer of brick, concrete and rubble (3004). To the southeast of 3018 was a soft brown silty deposit (3009) which was overlain by a series of brick and rubble layers (3008, 3011 and 3012). Cutting layer 3012 were three modern disturbances (3014, 3015 and 3016).

Overlying the cellars, a dark brown sandy silt (3003) covered the whole trench. This had been cut through by two pipe trenches (3007 and 3010). Layers of crushed stone (3002) tarmac (3001) and asphalt (3000) sealed the trench.

8.0 Finds

Most of the finds were of 19th or 20th -century date and the majority of these were not retained. Sherds of pottery were only retained from two contexts:

3042, Trench 1b; 1 x 17th -century coarseware jar sherd and 1x 17th- century coarseware bowl sherd.
3054, Trench 2; 2 x late 18th -century creamware sherds, 1x 19th –century English stoneware sherd, 1 x tin glazed earthernware handle.

9.0 Discussion and Implications

All three trenches demonstrated heavy disturbance by cellaring, as was suspected from the desk-based assessment (Watt 2001). A 17th-century waterlogged deposit (3042) in Trench 1b and the deposit 3006 in Trench 3, probably of a similar date, have proved the potential for survival of earlier archaeological deposits at depth. The reuse of sandstone blocks, presumably from an earlier structure, as footings for probable 19th - century wall 3047, Trench 2, indicates the potential for survival of earlier buildings within the Site.

The evaluation trenches did not locate any more significant or extensive earlier archaeological deposits because the trenches were too confined for safe deep excavation. However, the survival of deeply buried 'islands' of archaeology has been proved by the evaluation. Further evaluation of the archaeology may be necessary when larger areas of the site become available, making safe deeper excavations possible. Any recommendations for further evaluation and/or mitigation strategies would be decided upon by Birmingham City Council.

10.0 Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Nicol Thomas Limited on behalf of Marcity Developments. Thanks are due to Mr Paul Broad of Nicol Thomas Limited, Mr Terry Brown of Marcity Developments and Mr Paul Morris of South Birmingham College for their assistance. We are grateful to Dr Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist, Birmingham City Council, for advice and guidance on site. The evaluation was supervised by Josh Williams, with the assistance of Susie Blake, Melissa Conway and Philip Mann. Laurence Jones and Steve Litherland managed the project and Iain Ferris edited this report. Illustrations were prepared by Mark Breedon.

11.0 References

BUFAU 2001 *Floodgate Street/Milk Street, Digbeth, Birmingham City Centre. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation.* BUFAU

Hodder, M. 2001 *Floodgate Street/Milk Street, Digbeth, Birmingham City Centre. Design Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation.* Birmingham City Council

Litherland, S. 1995 *An Archaeological Assessment of the Digbeth Economic Regeneration Area and Cheapside Industrial Area.* BUFAU Report 337

Watt, S. 2001 *Floodgate Street/Milk Street, Digbeth, Birmingham City Centre: An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment.* BUFAU Report 768

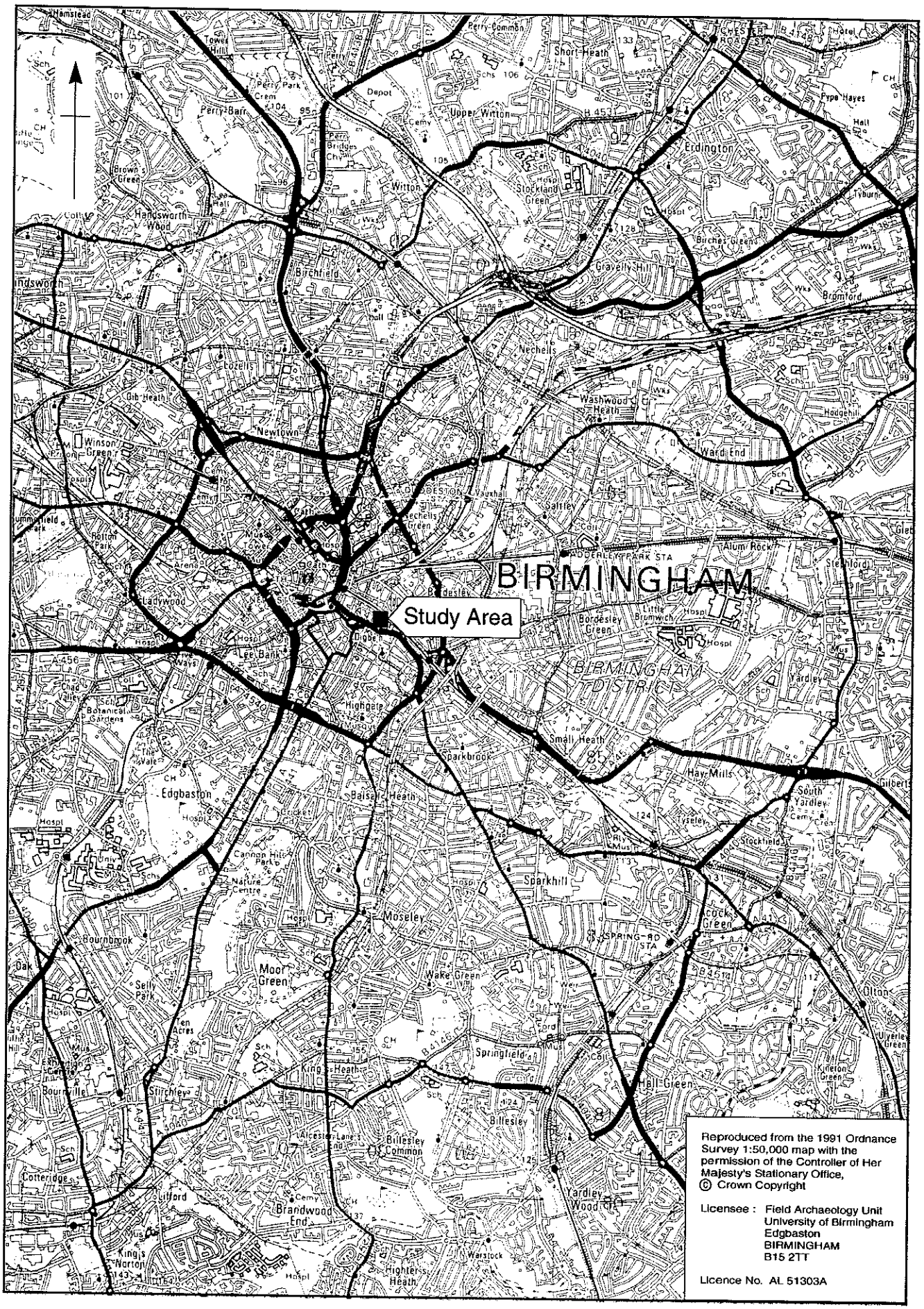
Study Area
BIRMINGHAM
BIRMINGHAM DISTRICT
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Fig.1

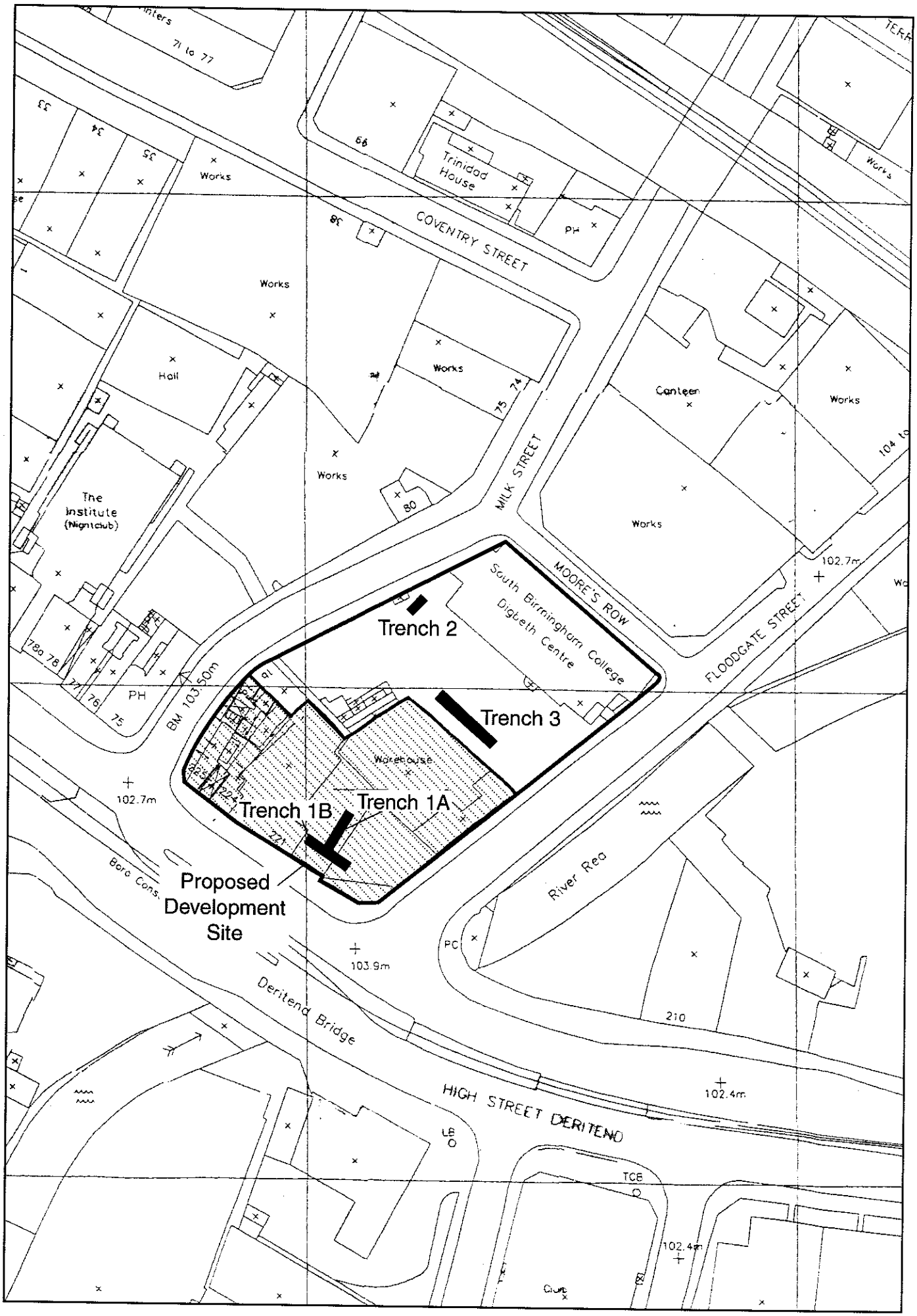
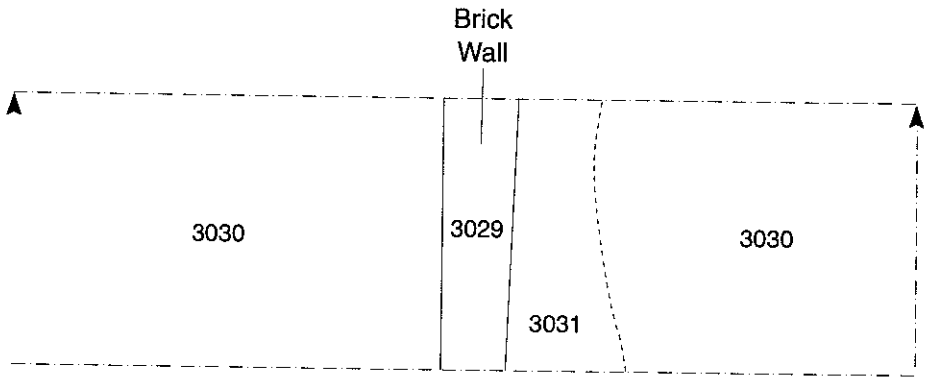

COVENTRY STREET
MILK STREET
MOORE'S ROW
FLOODGATE STREET
HIGH STREET DERITEND
Deritend Bridge
River Rea
Trinidad House
Works
Hall
Canteen
The Institute (Nightclub)
South Birmingham College Digbeth Centre
Warehouse
PH
PC
Trench 1A
Trench 1B
Trench 2
Trench 3
Proposed Development Site
BM 103.50m
102.7m
103.9m
102.4m
Boro Cons.
TCB

Fig.2

Trench 1A



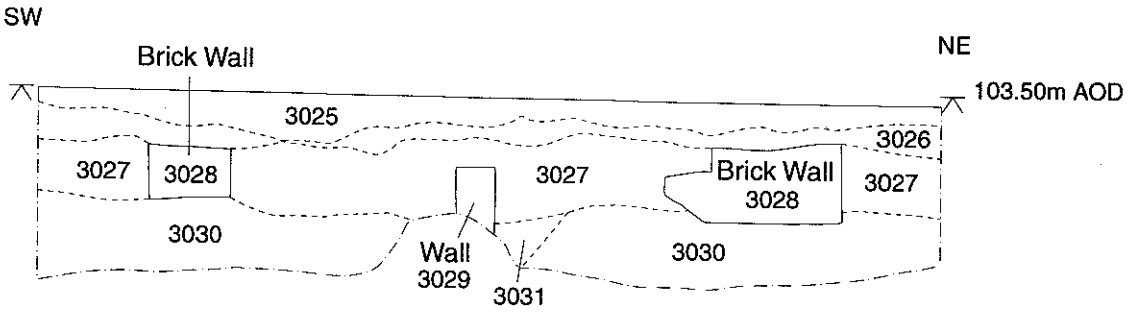


Fig.3

Trench 1B

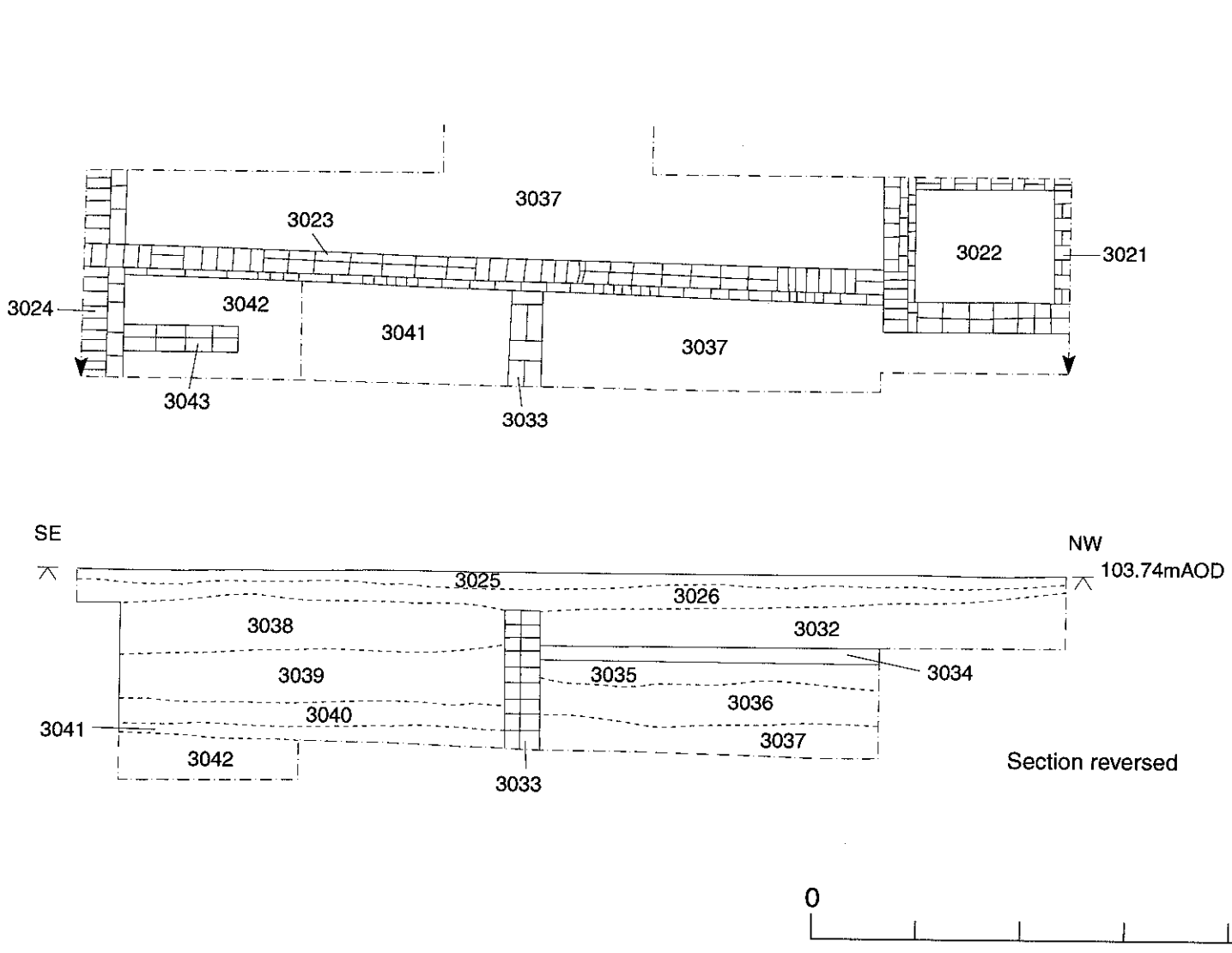


Fig.4

Trench 2

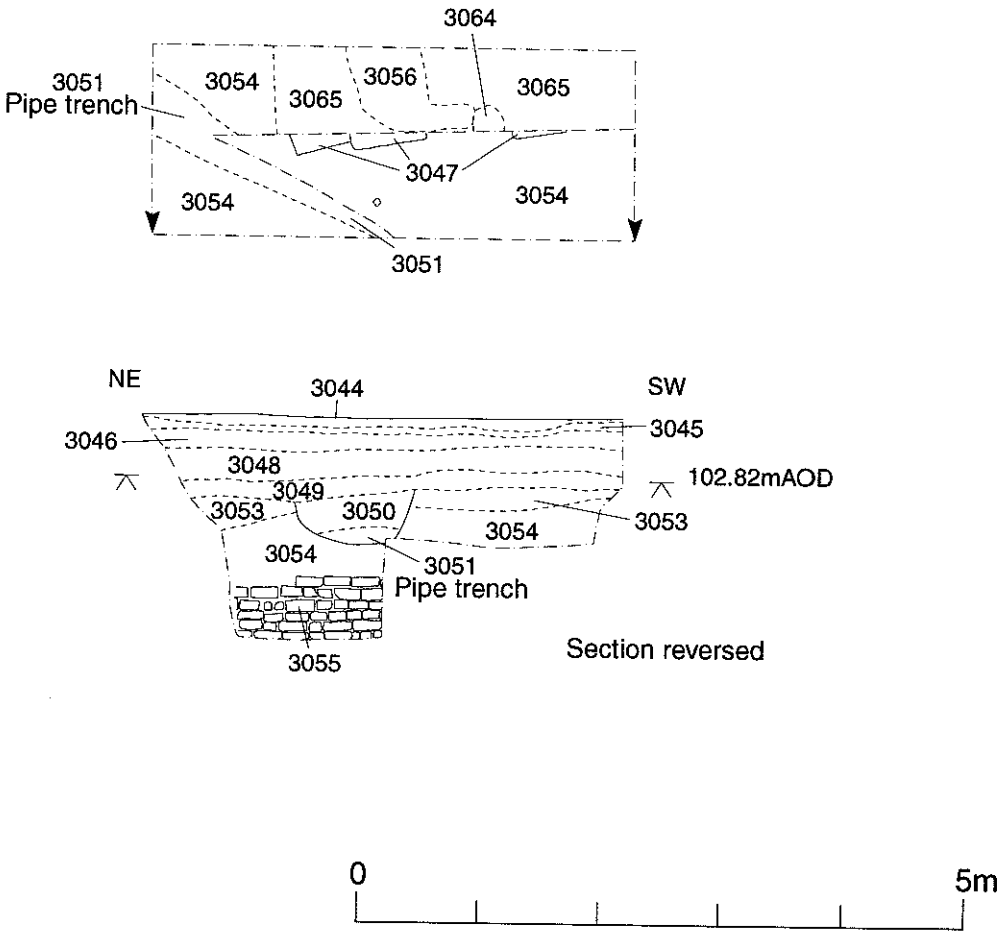


Fig.5

Trench 3

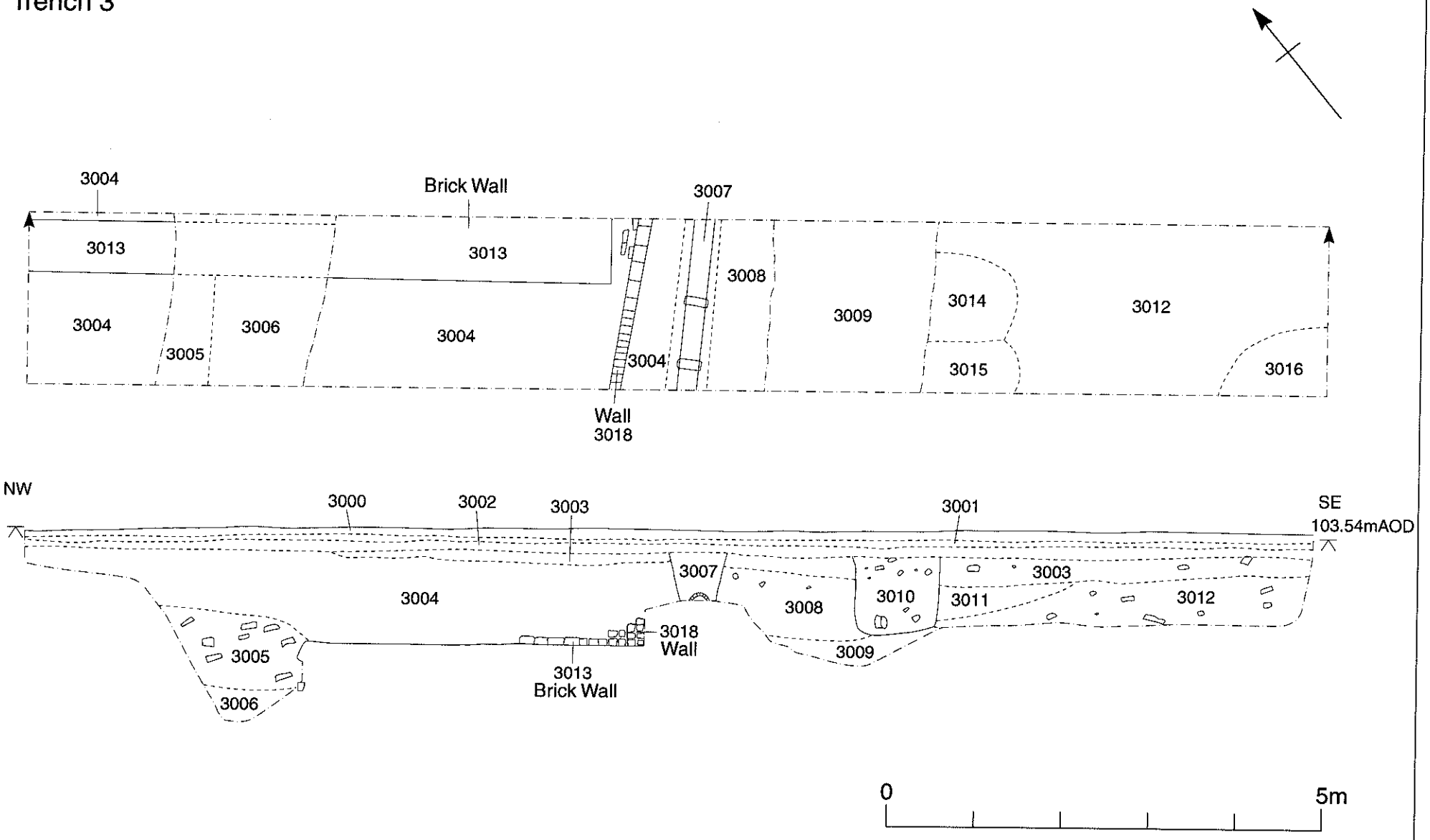


Fig.6

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE
Floodgate Street/Milk Street(SP 0782 8639)
Brief for *Archaeological Field Evaluation* as part of consideration of development proposals

1.Summary

Proposed development at Floodgate Street Milk Street is likely to affect below-ground archaeological remains of medieval and post-medieval date, including remains of leather tanning and deposits likely to provide information on past environmental conditions. This brief is for the second stage of assessment of the impact of the proposed development on archaeological remains, consisting of an ***archaeological field evaluation by means of excavated trenches.*** *This will determine the need for preservation of archaeological remains in-situ and/or for further archaeological excavation in advance of commencement of development, followed by analysis and publication of the results.*

2.Site location and description

The site is located on the north-east side of Digbeth and is bounded by Floodgate Street on the south-east, Milk Street on the north-west and Moore's Row on the north-east. The Moore's Row frontage, part of the Floodgate Street frontage and the Milk Street/Digbeth corner are currently occupied by buildings. The centre of the site and part of the Milk Street and Floodgate Street frontages are an asphalt surfaced open car park and the Digbeth/Floodgate Street corner is a surfaced yard, part asphalt and part loose material.

3.Planning background

The proposed development consists of new buildings on most of the site. The listed buildings in the south-west corner of the site are to be retained. Because the site is likely to include archaeological remains which would be affected by the proposed redevelopment, an assessment of its archaeological implications is required in advance of consideration of the proposals. This is in accordance with Policy 8.36 of the City Council's Unitary Development Plan and government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, "Archaeology and Planning". The archaeological field evaluation is the second stage of assessment and follows an archaeological desk-based assessment. Is required to define the nature, extent and significance of below-ground archaeological remains on the proposed development site, so that an appropriate mitigation scheme can be devised. The mitigation scheme may involve modification of site layout or foundation design to ensure in situ preservation of archaeological remains, or, if this is not feasible, full recording of archaeological remains in advance of development, through archaeological excavation followed by analysis and publication of the results.

4.Existing archaeological information

The site was included in an archaeological desk-based assessment of the whole of the Digbeth/High Street Deritend/High Street Bordesley frontage in 1995. This suggested that, because of its proximity to the River Rea and consequent susceptibility to flooding, the site was probably developed in a piecemeal fashion, possibly in the post-medieval period. The line of Milk Street was a former channel of the River Rea, and the road called Digbeth probably runs on an artificial causeway to cross the original two river courses. The ground level on the site has probably been raised in the past to facilitate building, therefore there is likely to be good survival of archaeological deposits. There is also potential for the survival of deposits in the former river channel which would provide information on past environmental conditions. In the early 17th century two pubs were built on the site. Both were demolished in the early 20th century. In the 18th century part of the site was occupied by a tanyard: an engraving of 1731 shows tanning pits and drying racks. Recent excavations have shown that leather tanning was an important Birmingham industry: remains of leather tanning from the 13th century onwards were found near Edgbaston Street, and from the 17th century and earlier between Gibb Street and Heath Mill Lane.

An archaeological desk-based assessment of the proposed development site was carried out in January 2001. This drew attention to the following:
(i)In addition to the depiction of tanning pits and drying racks on the 1732 illustration, a tanner leased this land in 1482-3 and a tanner owned Meeting House Yard, on the west side of the site, in 1698.
(ii)Waterlogged deposits resulting from flooding of the River Rea are likely to exist on the site, preserving remains of tanning and other industries.
(iii)"Islands" of archaeological deposits are likely to survive in many parts of the site where no cellaring exists. Repeated flooding may have precluded the construction of cellars.
(iv)Remains of the causeway built to raise Digbeth above flood level may survive at the southern edge of the site.
(v)There was a shortcutler on the site in the early 18th century, and there were forges on the site by the late 19th century.

The archaeological desk-based assessment defined three zones on the site, as follows:
Zone A- the surviving 19TH century buildings at the junction of Digbeth and Milk Street
Zone B- the Digbeth frontage and the southern part of the Floodgate Street frontage. Archaeological deposits are likely to survive as "islands " between later disturbance. Archaeological remains of the tanning industry may exist towards the northern edge of this zone, in and around the area currently occupied by a modern brick warehouse fronting onto Floodgate Street..

Zone C- the area currently occupied by a car park. This includes the area where tanning pits and drying racks area shown on the 1732 map, and probably remains of earlier tanning.

5.Requirements for work

The archaeological field evaluation is required to define the nature, extent and significance of below-ground archaeological remains on the proposed development site, so that an appropriate mitigation scheme can be devised. The mitigation strategies may involve modification of site layout or foundation design to ensure in situ preservation of archaeological remains, or, if this is not feasible, full recording of archaeological remains in advance of development.

In particular, the archaeological field evaluation must address the following:
(i)The likely survival of remains of leather tanning from the 18th century and earlier;
(ii)The likely survival of remains of past environmental conditions;
(iii)The likely survival of a possible artificial causeway carrying Digbeth;
(iv)The potential of the site to contribute to an understanding of the historic development of this part of Birmingham.

6.Stages of work

The archaeological field evaluation is to consist of at least one excavated trench of appropriate size in each of the two parts of the development site which are currently open, i.e. the the south-east corner at the junction of Floodgate Street and Digbeth and the north-west corner of the site, currently part of a car park. The exact location and size of each trench is to be agreed on site with the Planning Archaeologist prior to commencement. Surface deposits in each trench are to be mechanically removed, under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation is to be entirely manual. Excavation in each trench is to be sufficient to define record and sample all archaeological features encountered. The potential of deposits for environmental analysis must be assessed. Finds are to be cleaned, marked and bagged and any remedial conservation work undertaken.

7.Staffing

The archaeological field evaluation 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 that 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 field evaluation must be carried out to the satisfaction of the Chief Planning Officer, Birmingham City Council, and will be monitored on his behalf by the Planning Archaeologist. At least five working days notice of commencement of the assessment must be given to the Planning Archaeologist, so that monitoring meetings can be arranged.

10.Reporting
The results of the archaeological field evaluation are to be presented as a written report, containing the following:
(i)An analytical summary of features and deposits found in the evaluation;
(ii)Appropriate plans and sections;
(iii)A summary of finds;
(iv)An assessment of the site's significance in terms of national, regional and local importance. The non-statutory criteria for scheduling should be employed;
(v)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 field evaluation, together with any finds, must be deposited with an appropriate repository within a reasonable time of completion, following consultation with the Planning Archaeologist.

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* and summary reports to appropriate national period journals.

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BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
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