Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Excavation

at

The Old Bowling Green

Parsons Hill, Kings Norton

Birmingham

July 2006

Anne Foard-Colby

March 2007

Report 06/181

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REGISTERED IFA ORGANISATION

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MARCH 2007

NGR SP 0567 7895

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT THE OLD BOWLING GREEN PARSONS HILL, KINGS NORTON BIRMINGHAM

JULY 2006

REPORT 06/181

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	The Old Bowling Green, Parsons Hill, Kings Norton, Birmingham	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological excavation at the Old Bowling Green, Parsons Hill, Kings Norton, Birmingham. Four ditches were revealed, including a substantial Roman boundary ditch, a pit and three possible postholes. A small quantity of pottery ranging in date from the 1st – 16th centuries was recovered from the ditches and pit. A few other finds were also recovered.	
Project type (e.g. desk-based, field evaluation etc)	Excavation	
Previous work (reference to organisation or SMR numbers etc)	Archaeological desk-based assessment and trial trenching by Birmingham Archaeology 2005	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	None	
Monument type And period	Roman and medieval enclosure ditches	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)		
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	West Midlands	
Site address (including postcode)	Parsons Hill, Kings Norton	
Easting (use numerical 100km grid square no.)	40567	
Northing	27895	
Height OD	164m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Birmingham City Council	
Project Design originator	John Samuels Archaeological Consultants	
Director/Supervisor	Anne Foard-Colby	
Project Manager	Iain Soden (NA) Paul Gajos (JSAC)	
Sponsor or funding body	Bellway Homes	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	July 2006	
End date	July 2006	
ARCHIVES	**Location (Accession no.)**	**Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone etc)**
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	Archaeological Excavation at the Old Bowling Green, Parsons Hill, Kings Norton, Birmingham	
Serial title & volume	06/181	
Author(s)	Anne Foard-Colby	
Page numbers		
Date	March 2007	

Contents

PLATES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
AT
THE OLD BOWLING GREEN, PARSONS HILL
KINGS NORTON, BIRMINGHAM
JULY 2006

ABSTRACT

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological excavation at the Old Bowling Green, Parsons Hill, Kings Norton, Birmingham. A substantial Roman ditch was revealed, and three later ditches, a pit and three possible postholes which were probably post-medieval. A small quantity of pottery ranging in date from the 1st – 16th centuries was recovered from the ditches. A few other finds were also recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological excavation in July 2006 on land proposed for residential development at the Old Bowling Green, Parsons Hill, Kings Norton, Birmingham (NGR: SP 0567 7895; Fig 1, Plate 1).

The work was undertaken in order to fulfil a planning condition (planning reference: S/04728/05/FUL) for the construction of housing. Northamptonshire Archaeology were commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants acting on behalf of their clients Bellway Homes following a brief issued by Birmingham City Council Planning Archaeologist on 11th October 2005.

The purpose of the excavation was to mitigate the effect of the development on the existing archaeology in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains that were to be affected by the development.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

An archaeological desk-based assessment of the site was carried out in 2005 (Birmingham Archaeology 2005). It suggested a potential for the presence of Romano-British settlement at the Parsons Hill site, which is situated close to the Icknield Street Roman road. Romano-British remains had been observed previously in the vicinity of Parsons Hill during construction works in the 1950s. The remains of the Romano-British roadside settlement consisted of sloping gravel floors surmounted by burnt layers containing charcoal and daub and narrow gullies, which produced pottery dating from late the 1st to 3rd centuries AD (Hodder 2004). The medieval village of Kings Norton also lies in the vicinity of Parsons Hill, together with outlying farms and mills.

Approximately 1km to the south of Parsons Hill, extensive Romano-British settlement remains, including a ditched enclosure, pebble surfaces, pits and postholes of timber buildings, have been recorded from archaeological excavations at Longdales Road, Kings Norton (Hodder 2004; BA 2005) (Fig 1). Pottery from the site was dated from the late 2nd to 4th centuries AD. Further excavations during 2006 at this site have shown that land divisions were positioned at right angles to Icknield Street, while later boundaries follow this same pattern. The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map suggests that long-lived land divisions continued further north towards the Parsons Hill site.

Situated approximately 5km to the north of Parsons Hill, and a short distance from Icknield Street, a Roman fort and associated settlement have been excavated at Metchley, Edgbaston (Hodder 2004) (Fig 1). Pottery from this site suggests that the fort was occupied from the mid 1st to late 2nd centuries AD.

Following on from and informed by the desk-based assessment, a programme of evaluation was conducted by Birmingham Archaeology comprising two trenches excavated through the Old Bowling Green to the west of the former Sporting Parson Public House (BA 2005). Results suggested two phases of activity, an undated phase of features consisting of a ditch and gully cutting natural clay, overlain by a phase of *in situ* layers and metalled surfaces, dated by a small ceramic assemblage to the 13th and early 14th centuries AD. A few residual sherds of Roman pottery were also recovered. It was suggested that the earlier features could be early medieval or Romano-British in date.

3 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The development site is located in a built up area to the east of Kings Norton, south Birmingham. Formerly the bowling green of the Sporting Parson public house, the site is bounded to the north and north-west by housing, to the east by the former public house and to the south by the modern road, Parsons Hill. It is located on a flat plateau at *c*164mOD, the ground falling steeply away to the west and south-west.

The underlying solid geology consists of superficial deposits of glacial Boulder Clay and drift, forming an island over an expanse of Triassic Keuper Marl (BGS 1960, sheet 168).

4 METHODOLOGY

Excavation was briefed to be undertaken in two stages; phase 1 to remove the topsoil and overburden down to a metalled surface identified in the trial trenching. However, this surface proved to be a drainage layer within the bowling green and so phase 2 (to remove the metalled surface and excavate below) was implemented immediately. An area of approximately 26m by 23m was excavated using a mechanical digger fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket under continuous archaeological supervision. Mechanical excavation proceeded as far as the surface of natural mottled orange/red sandy clay.

All potential archaeological features were examined by hand excavation. Standard Northamptonshire Archaeology recording procedures were employed. Levels were taken and related to Ordnance Survey Datum. Contexts were recorded on pro-forma sheets with a unique context number being allocated to each distinct deposit and feature. The site was planned at 1:50 and sections were recorded at 1:10 or 1:20. Environmental samples were taken from secure archaeological contexts to recover paleobotanical and paleozoological evidence.

A full photographic record comprising both 35mm monochrome negatives, with associated prints, and colour transparencies was maintained, with additional digital photographs. All records were compiled during fieldwork into a comprehensive and fully cross-referenced site archive. The site code was KNP06.

All works were conducted in accordance with the *IFA Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations* (1994, revised 1999) and the *Code of Conduct* of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1985, revised 2000). All procedures complied with the Northamptonshire County

Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines (2003).

Monitoring of the programme of fieldwork was carried out by Mike Hodder, the Birmingham Planning Archaeologist on behalf of Birmingham City Council and by Paul Gajos for John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (now CGMS).

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

Introduction

Natural geology comprised mid red/brown silty clay with occasional gravel inclusions (107), which was encountered at depths of approximately 1.1m on the south and west of the site and 0.4m on the east side of the site. Overlying this layer in places was naturally deposited orange/red mottled sandy clay with gravel inclusion (106), which was 0.2m thick.

This natural sandy clay was overlain by subsoil (105), approximately 0.14m – 0.18m thick, and buried topsoil (104), approximately 0.05m thick. The ground surface appeared originally to have fallen away steeply to the west and south-west. During the construction of the bowling green, the site had been levelled, using soil from the east side of the site to build up the height of the ground on the west and south-west of the site.

A levelling layer, consisting of re-deposited natural clays, subsoil and topsoil (103), overlay the buried topsoil, and was approximately 0.5m thick. A layer of clinker (102) overlay the levelling layers and was 0.05m thick. A layer of free draining sandy soil (101) overlay the whole area that was originally the bowling green and was 0.2m thick.

The ditches and gullies

The earliest feature, aligned east to west, was a large ditch [130], measuring 3.2m at its widest and 1.18m deep, with a broad ‘V- shaped profile (Figs 2 and 3, Sections 5 and 6, Plates 2 and 3). It cut directly into natural deposits and was sealed by subsoil layer (105). Its primary fill was medium grey silty clay with some rounded gravel and larger cobbles and organic material (129). A re-cut [120], measured 2.76m and 0.7m deep. Its fill (119) consisted of light grey brown sandy clay with gravel inclusions and contained sherds of 1st to 2nd century AD Roman pottery and charcoal flecks.

Aligned east to west, ditch [116], was 1.7m wide and 0.46m deep (Figs 2 and 3, Section 4, Plates

4 and 5). Its profile was a wide, 'U'-shape which cut into natural layers (106) and (107). It was filled with mid orange brown sandy clay with frequent gravel and charcoal flecks (115). The fill contained residual Iron Age and medieval pottery, and fragments of a Tudor brick.

Aligned east to west, gully [118] was situated to the immediate south of ditch [116]. It was 0.78m by 0.25m with a shallow 'U'-shaped profile, which cut natural clay (106) (Figs 2 and 3, Section 3, Plates 4 and 5). It was filled with mid grey brown sandy clay with frequent pebbles and charcoal flecks (117). Roman and medieval pottery, a fragment of daub, roof tile and a fragment of possible quernstone was recovered from the fill.

Gully [112], aligned east to west, was 0.62m wide and 0.12m deep with a shallow 'U'-shaped profile and flattish base (Figs 2 and 3, Section 1, Plate 6). It was filled by light orange brown sandy clay with small rounded gravel (111). A sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from the fill; but this is residual as the gully had been cut through the modern levelling layers. It overlay but did not cut pit [128].

The pit

Pit [128] was 1m wide by 0.2m deep, with steep sides and a flat base (Figs 2 and 3, Section 2, Plate 7). It was filled with mid grey brown sandy clay with some pebbles (127). No artefacts were present in the fill. The pit was overlain but not cut by gully [112].

The postholes

Three postholes in a row, aligned east to west [122], [124] and [126], were 0.65m – 0.93m wide by 0.1m – 0.13m deep (Fig 2, Plate 8). They were shallow sided with flat bases and were shown to be of recent date as they cut the make-up layer (103).

6 THE FINDS

The pottery

by Stephanie Ratkai

The pottery recovered from the excavation comprised for the most part small and heavily abraded sherds (see table Appendix 2). This is similar to the material from the evaluation reported on elsewhere (BA 2005).

Iron Age pottery

One residual sherd from fill (115), ditch [116], stood out as different from the rest; a small black sherd with one partial, (?exterior) oxidised surface. The complete surface was black, finely micaceous and smoothed. The quartz, quartzite and sandstone temper would fit equally well into the Late Iron Age or Early-Middle Saxon periods but is less convincing as an early post-Conquest sherd and the fabric is nothing like the other medieval sherds from the site. A late Iron Age date would perhaps fit better with the apparently early Roman occupation but the sherd is so small, that it is impossible to be certain.

Roman pottery

The earliest Roman pottery came from fill (119), ditch recut [120] of ditch [130]. This was a large rim sherd from a large greyware jar with abundant organic temper. The fabric can be paralleled in the Warwickshire Roman Pottery Type Series (fabric R31, pers. comm. Dr J Evans) and dates to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Fill (119) also contained several Severn Valley Ware sherds which were heavily abraded. These represented one or two tankards and at least one large storage jar. None of the Severn Valley sherds was chronologically diagnostic but there seems no reason to assume that they were not of a similar date to the greyware. If the pottery in fill (119) is early, then it is in marked contrast to pottery recovered from nearby Roman enclosures at Longdales Road which seem to be predominantly 3rd or 4th century in date. Single residual Roman sherds were found in fill (113), the fill of a land drain and fill (117), gully [118].

Medieval pottery

A small number of small medieval cooking pot sherds were present. One of these contained Malvernian granitic rock temper and a second sherd may also have been Malvernian. A third sherd was probably a variant of reduced Deritend ware (Rátkai forthcoming) made in the centre of Birmingham. The remaining cooking pot sherds contained varying amounts of sand, organics, mica, mudstone and sandstone. The inclusions were poorly sorted and it was not possible to tell if the sherds were essentially the same fabric or not. One or two of the cooking pot sherds could have been oxidised Deritend ware cooking pots. That Deritend wares did reach Parson's Hill, is attested by a glazed Deritend ware sherd from the foregoing Birmingham Archaeology (BA 2005) evaluation, from (1008), the equivalent of excavation layer (103), dating to the 13th or early 14th centuries. The cooking pot sherds looked to date to the 13th or possibly 14th centuries. There were however three sherds from that evaluation, context (2004), the equivalent of excavation layer (104), 'buried topsoil', which looked rather earlier and were probably of 12th century date.

Early post-medieval pottery

Later ceramics were represented by late oxidised wares dating to the 15th-16th centuries and Cistercian Ware, dating to the late 15th-mid 16th centuries. Unlike the rest of the pottery these sherds were not abraded, although still small. They were found in layers (101) and (105). BA evaluation context (1007), the equivalent of 'buried subsoil' (105) also contained a Cistercian Ware sherd.

Discussion

The medieval pottery was very abraded and probably represents plough soil scatters incorporated into feature fills, so, in effect, the post-Roman features could be of any date. The pottery is certainly not consistent with detritus from nearby domestic occupation. Although the assemblages from the evaluation and excavation were small, there is a lack of material later than the 16th century.

Ceramic building material

by Pat Chapman

Roof tile

There are nine fragments of roof tile, weighing 526g, from fills (111, 115 and 117) of ditches [112, 116 and 118] and from context (113), which was the fill of a land drain and therefore residual. There are no pegholes or nibs. The only measurable dimension is the thickness for five of the pieces, which is between 15mm and 20mm, while the remaining three are just thin fragments. The fabric is a medium to slightly soft silty clay, orange in colour.

Brick

There is part of one brick, broken into three pieces, from fill (115) ditch [116]. The fabric is very hard and fine and is dark red with a blackish surface. It is two inches (50mm) thick, which together with its colour would suggest that it dates to the 16th into the 17th century.

Stone

by Andy Chapman

A small fragment of hard sandstone, possibly from a rotary quern was recovered from fill (117) gully [118].

Environmental Evidence

by Karen Deighton

Method

Eight samples were collected by hand from the site during the course of excavation. Six samples were processed using a siraf tank fitted with a 500micron mesh and flot sieve. Any resulting flots were dried and examined under a microscope (10x magnification).

Results

Table 1: Environmental finds by sample and context

Sample	Context (fill) [cut]	Feature	Volume (litres)	Charcoal *	Cereal	Wild /weed
1	(111) [112]	gully	20	20	?	1
2	(115) [116]	ditch	20	20		2
5	(117) [118]	gully	20	10		5
6	(127) [128]	pit	20	20		1
7	(119) [120]	Roman ditch	20	20		
8	(129) [130]	Roman ditch	20	10		29

*approximate number of fragments

The weed seeds appeared to be small legumes, but could not be identified further.

Conclusion

Only samples 7 (fill 119) and 8 (129) are from significant contexts thought to be Roman. Sample 7 contained nothing of interest, but sample 8 from the dark lower fill of ditch [130], contained wild/weed seeds indicating the clearance of land by burning, or the burning of refuse.

7 DISCUSSION

The Birmingham Archaeology evaluation was perhaps constrained by limited scope. However, the area excavation has clarified issues and questions that were raised by the evaluation. The sequence of archaeological deposits on the site has proved to be much simpler than the evaluation had suggested.

The archaeological field evaluation (BA 2005) at the Old Bowling Green, Parsons Hill, Kings Norton, suggested that archaeological deposits and features, of Romano-British and medieval date survived *in situ*. These deposits included the presence of metalled surfaces and ditches and gullies. The open area excavation undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology was to further investigate these features by excavating in two phases, firstly the 'upper metalled' surfaces of alleged medieval date, then the underlying phase of Romano-British date sealed by the 'metalled surfaces'. During open area excavation it became clear that the suggested metalled surfaces were

the result of particularly stony layers of buried topsoil and subsoil and any pottery recovered was residual or imported to the site. These may have been drainage layers for the bowling green.

The earliest feature on the site, a Romano-British ditch, cut the natural geology and was aligned east-west. It was a large, deep ditch, with evidence of a re-cut, and the deeper, concave channel in the base at the east end, suggests water erosion. Charcoal and weed seeds were present in the primary fill, the presence of which suggests clearance of land or burning of refuse. A small amount of 1st and 2nd century Roman pottery was recovered from the re-cut. The steep slope of the ground to the south and south-west, would suggest that the ditch may have enclosed an area of land to the north, at the edge of the hill.

A ditch and gully to the south of the Roman ditch were on the same alignment, but are later in date. The ditch contained only residual pottery, and is dated by fragments of early post-medieval brick. The gully contained sherds of residual Roman pottery, medieval pottery, roof tile and a piece of daub, together with charcoal.

A small gully and the three postholes were cut into a levelling layer and are of a later period on the basis of stratification. A single sherd of residual medieval pottery was recovered from the fill of the gully.

The site appears to have been marginal to occupation in both the early Romano-British period and the later medieval period. It contains no focus which might shed light upon other nearby sites and is more properly part of the landscape context in which other nearby sites rest. It falls within the purview of the Longdales Road site which is more focal. Local occupation based on data from both that site and this suggests occupation, whether continuous or not, between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. The lack of pottery later than the 16th century may suggest that the land was turned over to pasture after this date.

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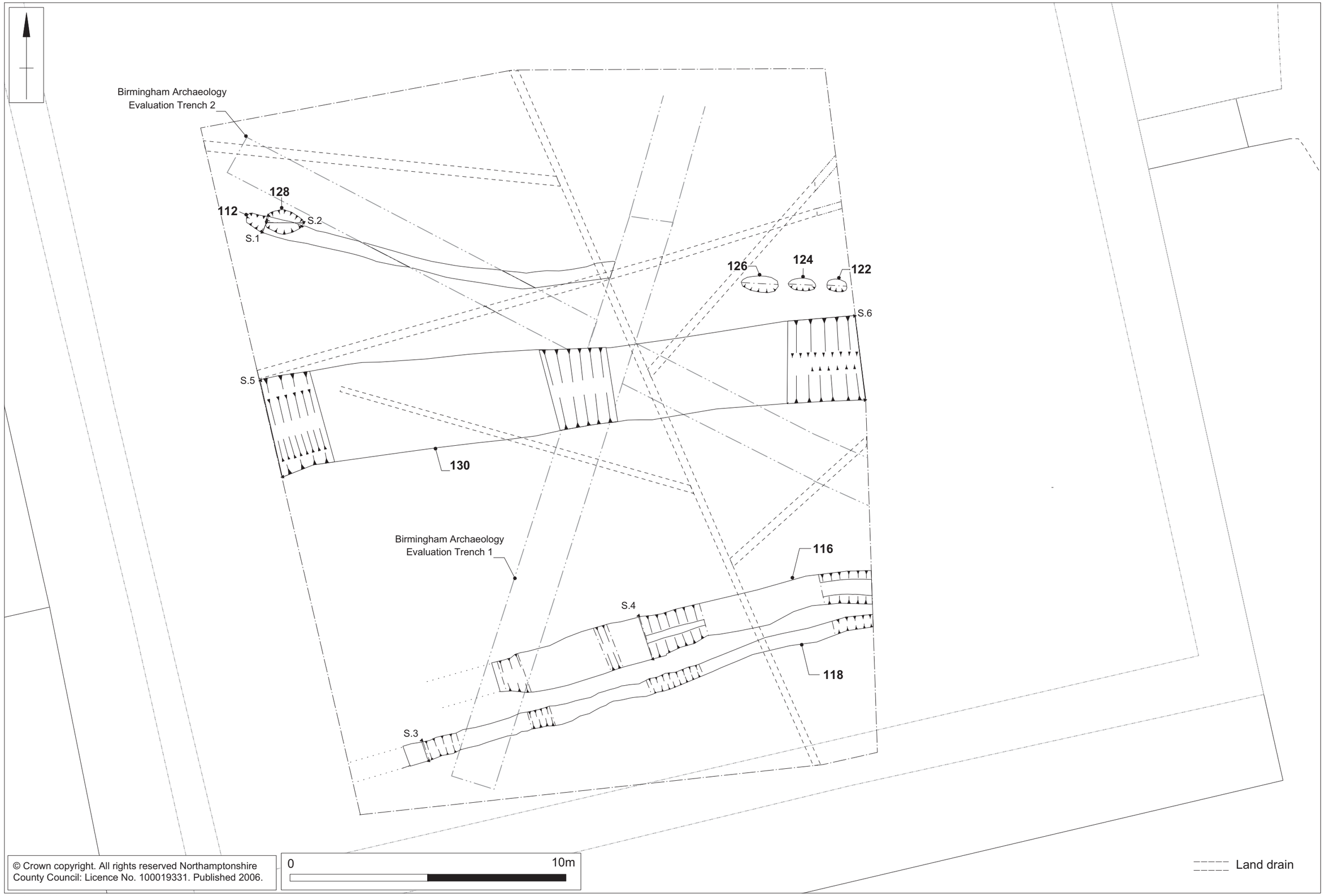
Northamptonshire Archaeology
Northamptonshire County Council March 2007

APPENDIX A1: SITE DATA

Context	Type	Description	Artefact types
101	Layer	Topsoil (bowling green) 0.18m-0.2m thick	Late med pottery
102	Layer	Clinker layer 0.05m-0.07m thick	
103	Layer	Levelling layer, mixed pale red/orange and cream/light brown clay approx. 0.5m thick	
104	Layer	Buried topsoil, mid-dark grey brown sand clay loam 0.05m thick	
105	Layer	Buried subsoil mid brown sandy clay loam with frequent pebbles 0.14m-0.18m thick	Late med pottery
106	Layer	Natural mottled orange/red sandy clay with rounded pebbles maximum thickness 0.2m	
107	Layer	Natural mid red/brown silty clay with few pebbles, unknown depth	
108		Not assigned	
109		Not assigned	
110		Not assigned	
111	Fill	Fill of [112] light orange brown sandy clay with frequent gravel 0.62m wide 0.12m deep	Med pottery, tile frags
112	Cut	Cut of possible linear aligned SE-NW with terminus at NW end, shallow 'U'-shaped uneven profile	
113	Fill	Fill of [114]	Roman & med pottery, tile
114	Cut	Cut of land drain	
115	Fill	Fill of [116] mid orange brown sandy clay with frequent gravel and charcoal flecks max. width 1.7m max. depth 0.42m	IA or mid Saxon & med pottery, tile, Tudor brick frags
116	Cut	Cut of ditch, aligned E-W shallow 'U'-shaped profile	
117	Fill	Fill of [118]Mid to dark grey brown sandy silty loam with mortar, rubble, charcoal and some gravel 0.12m thick	Roman & med pottery, tile, daub, quern frag
118	Cut	Cut of gulley, aligned E-W shallow, open 'U' shaped profile with shallow concave base	
119	Fill	Fill of [120] light grey/brown sandy clay with some small – med and occasional large gravel/pebbles, maximum 2.76m wide 0.7m deep	Roman pottery
120	Cut	Cut of ditch, aligned E-W with 'U'-shaped profile, concave base	
121	Fill	Fill of [122] light – mid grey/brown sandy silt with some gravel, red clay patches and charcoal lumps 1.10m long 0.8m wide 0.5m deep but not bottomed	
122	Cut	Cut of pit aligned N-S with steep sides a break in the slope and steep again	
123	Fill	Fill of [124] mid to dark grey/brown sandy silt with gravel and charcoal fleck inclusions 0.44m diameter 0.10m deep	
124	Cut	Cut of post hole, shallow 'U'-shaped profile concave base	
125	Fill	Fill of [126] mid to dark grey/brown sandy silt with gravel and charcoal fleck inclusions 0.44m diameter 0.12m deep	
126	Cut	Cut of post hole, shallow 'U'-shaped profile concave base	
127	Fill	Fill of [128] mid to dark grey/brown silty sand with moderate gravel inclusions and charcoal, 0.41m long 0.32m wide 0.8m deep	
128	Cut	Cut of pit, 'U'-shaped profile, flat base	
129	Fill	Fill of [130] mid brown/grey silty clay with gravel and larger pebbles, charcoal flecks & pieces of wood. 3.2m wide 1.2m deep	
130	Cut	Cut of ditch, aligned E-W with 'V' shaped profile, flat base	

APPENDIX A2: POTTERY BY CONTEXT

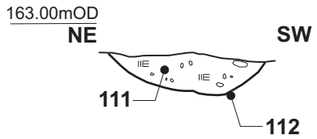
Context	Fabric type	Description	Qty	Wght	Mv	Form
01	Late medieval wheel-thrown	Sandy late oxidised ware	1	12		
105	Late medieval wheel-thrown	Cistercian ware	1	3		cup
105	Late medieval wheel-thrown	Sandy late oxidised ware	1	11		jug/cistern
105	Late medieval wheel-thrown	Sandy late oxidised ware	1	3		
111	Medieval	Sandy with organics, mudstone and rare fine grained sandstone	1	12		cpj
113	Medieval	Sandy with some mudstone and organics	1	15	1	bowl?
113	Medieval	Finely sandy with mica and organics, rare sandstone and micaceous sandstone	3	9		
113	Roman	Sandy with orange grog	1	9		
115	Medieval	Reduced Deritend ware variant?	1	3		cpj
115	Malvernian	Malvernian	1	5		cpj
115	Medieval	Sandy with organics and mudstone	1	8		cpj
115	Medieval	Sandy with some fine-grained sandstone	1	3		cpj
115	Medieval	Sandy with organics and some mica	2	13		cpj
115	IA/E-MS	Coarse quartz, quartzite, fine -grained sandstone and mica	1	4		
117	Daub	daub	1	5		
117	Medieval	med sandy cooking pot with some mudstone	2	10		cooking pot
117	Roman	Grey ware with sand and organics (Warks Type Series: Roman fabric R31)	1	3		
119	Roman	Grey ware with sand and organics (Warks Type Series: Roman fabric R31)	1	156	1	large storage jar
119	Roman	Severn Valley Ware	12	103		
119	Roman	Severn Valley Ware	1	31		tankard handle
119	Roman	Severn Valley Ware	1	8		tankard base



Scale 1:125

Site plan Fig 2

Section 1



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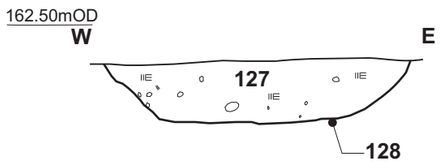

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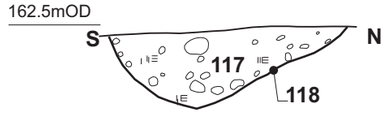

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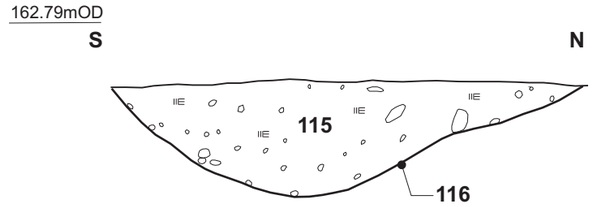

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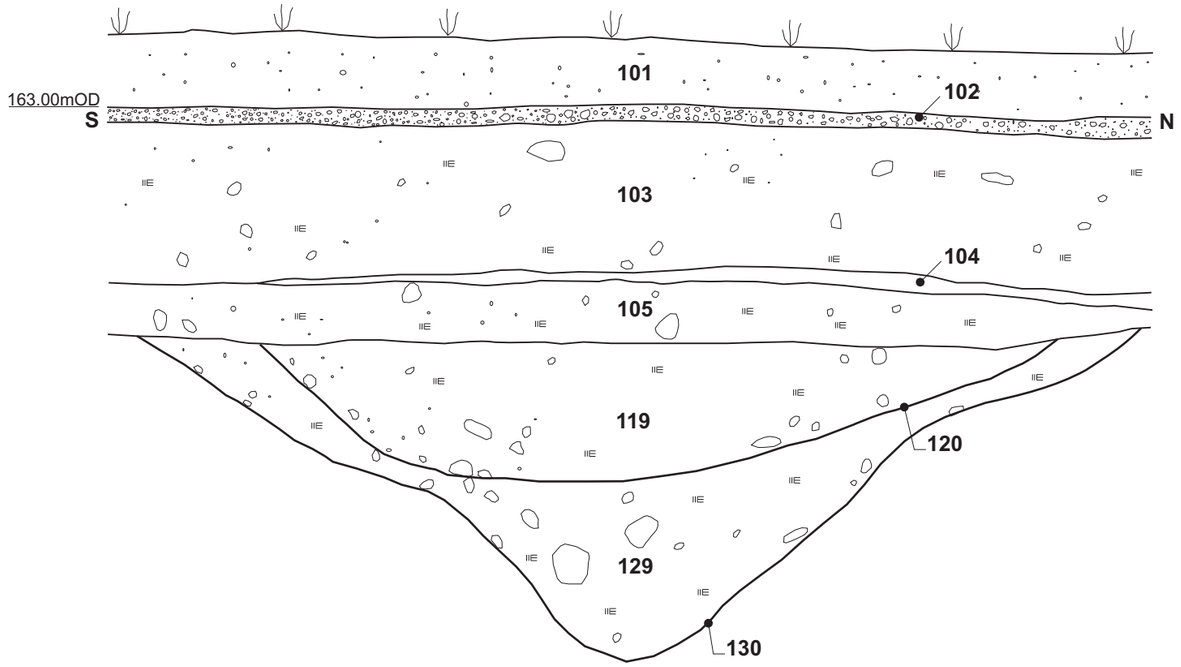

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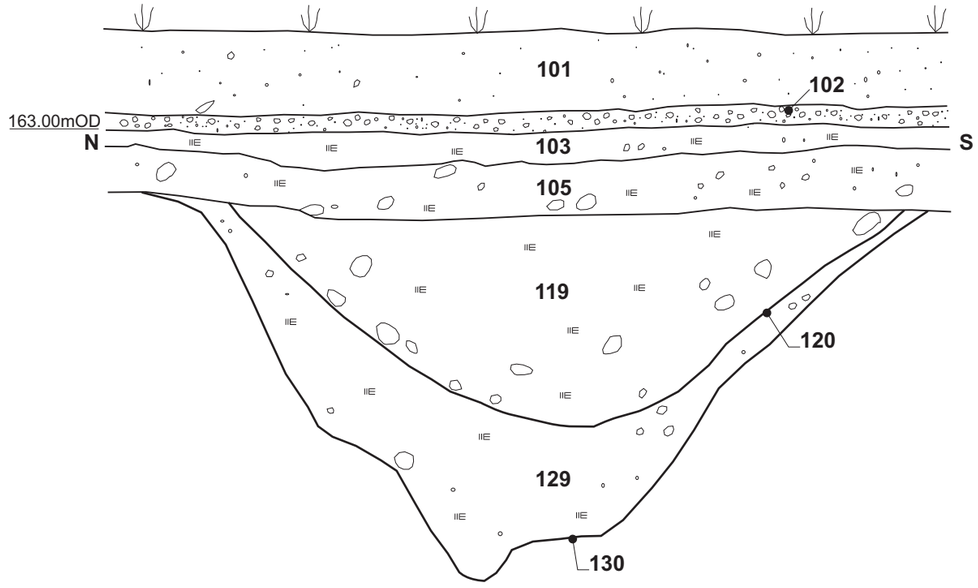

Clay

0 1m

Sections 1-6 Fig 3

Plate 1: Old Bowling Green before excavation, looking north

Plate 2: Ditch [130], section 6, looking east

Plate 3: Ditch [130], section 5, looking west

Plate 4: Ditches [116] and [118], looking east

Plate 5: Ditches [118] and [116], looking west

Plate 6: Gully [112], section 1, terminus, looking south-east

Plate 7: Pit [128], looking north-west

Plate 8: Postholes [126], [124] and [122], looking north