
Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Watching Brief on Land
at Brasshouse Lane Infants School,
Brasshouse Lane,
Smethwick, West Midlands
May-June 2005



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Report 06/3

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON LAND
AT BRASSHOUSE LANE INFANTS SCHOOL,
BRASSHOUSE LANE, SMETHWICK, WEST MIDLANDS
MAY-JUNE 2005

Planning Application Number: DC/02/39387

Site: Brasshouse Lane Infants School

SMR Number: 10030

NGR: SP 0220 8907

Abstract

A watching brief was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology during the groundworks for the construction of new houses on land at Brasshouse Lane Infants School, Brasshouse Lane Smethwick West Midlands. No archaeological features were seen during the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology were commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants to undertake an archaeological watching brief during development at land at Brasshouse Infants' School, Brasshouse Lane, Smethwick, West Midlands in May and June 2005 (NGR SP 0220 8907 Fig 1).

Barratt West Midlands made an outline planning application (DC/02/39387) for the redevelopment of the Brasshouse Lane Infants' School site, to Sandwell MBC in June 2002. The proposed scheme sought to demolish all of the existing structures within the application area and to erect thirty new residential dwellings with parking, access roads and associated works.

The school buildings have already been recorded (JSAC 2005a); they were constructed in the late 19th century and consisted of a range of 19th century buildings fronting Brasshouse Lane, with a further range to the south west and play areas to the east.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The development area (*c* 5875 m²) is located at the junction of Brasshouse Lane and Pottery Road, Smethwick. The site is located on Red Marl at an altitude of about 161 metres above Ordnance Datum.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first industrial works of any kind in Smethwick was the brasshouse, from which Brasshouse Lane takes its name. It had been established near the canal by 1790 on a site occupied in 1792 by part of the works of the District Iron and Steel Co. Ltd. Shares in Smethwick Brass Works were on sale in 1792 and 1795; in 1834 the proprietor was the Smethwick Brass Co., manufacturer of ingot brass. The company was probably formed, like the Birmingham Metal Co. of 1781, by Birmingham brass users anxious to break the virtual monopoly of supply by the Cheadle and Bristol brasshouses; it is perhaps to be identified with the 'Brass Company' which paid rates on a house at Bearwood Hill in 1778. Its later history is obscure, but it had apparently gone out of business by 1842, when the District Iron and Steel Co. held its former premises. The building was still standing in the 1860s (Greenslade 1976 in JSAC 2005b).

The Borough Archaeologist notes that although there is no evidence for structures on the 1828 tithe map, there are structures on the opposite side of Pottery Lane directly adjacent to the site. The development area is within an area identified as having archaeological potential for these early industrial remains (Sandwell MBC 2005).

4 AIMS

The aims of this investigation are

- to locate, identify and assess the state of preservation of any potential archaeological remains, in particular remains associated with the brasshouse.
- to provide further information on the origins and development of Smethwick and the historic character of the development area.
- to assess the artefactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits encountered.
- to place these remains within their local, regional and national context
- to produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the local SMR.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

A watching brief was maintained as a series of visits to view the removal of the footings belonging to the infants school and the excavation of the footings trenches and drainage runs for the new houses (Fig 2).

At the time of the watching brief the surface of the school play ground had been removed and hardcore put down. The watching brief demonstrated that below the modern crush layer there was a make up layer for the school playground, below which was the natural red marl. This may suggest that the site was truncated when the school and playground were constructed. No archaeological features were noted during the course of the watching brief.

6 CONCLUSION

No archaeological features or artefacts were noted or recovered during the course of the watching brief. The excavated footings trenches only exposed the natural red marl and modern intrusions consisting of service trenches.

No deep cut features or walls relating to earlier industrial use were observed, suggesting that early industrial premises did not occupy the site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

JSAC 2005a *Historic Building Record Brasshouse Lane Infants School Brasshouse Lane Smethwick* John Samuels Archaeological Consultants

JSAC 2005b *A Specification for Archaeological Watching Brief: Brasshouse Infants' School, Brasshouse Lane, Smethwick, West Midlands* John Samuels Archaeological Consultants

Sandwell MBC 2005 *Archaeological Evaluation & Historic Building Record Brasshouse Lane Infants School Brasshouse Lane Smethwick*

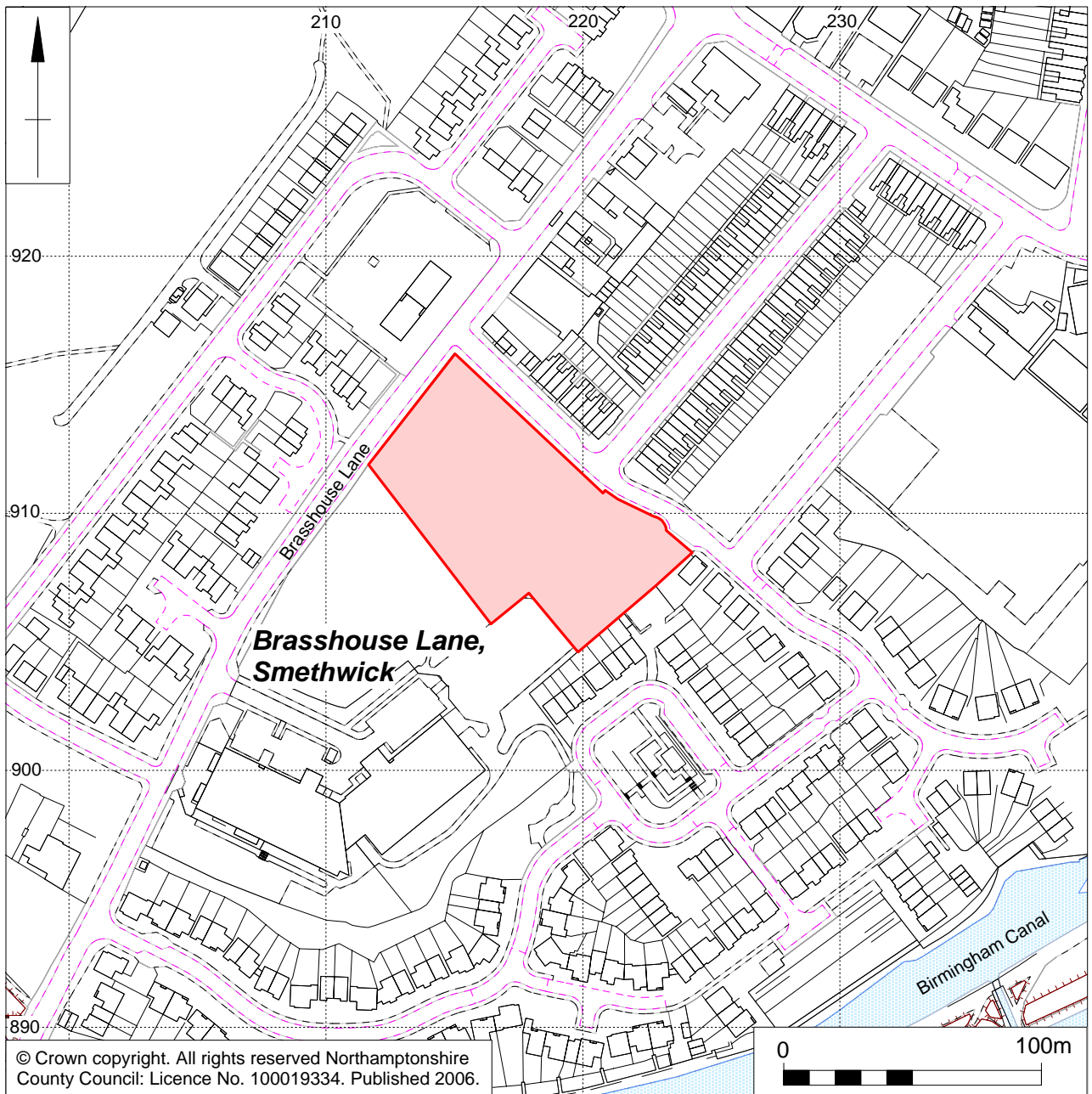


Fig 1



Fig 2