

*Marches Archaeology*

**The Arts Centre**

**Bird Street  
Lichfield  
Staffordshire**

**Report on  
salvage recording**

March 1999

*Marches Archaeology Series 062*

*Archaeological Consultants and Contractors*

**A report on salvage recording at  
The Arts Centre  
Bird Street  
Lichfield**

NGR: SK 115 096

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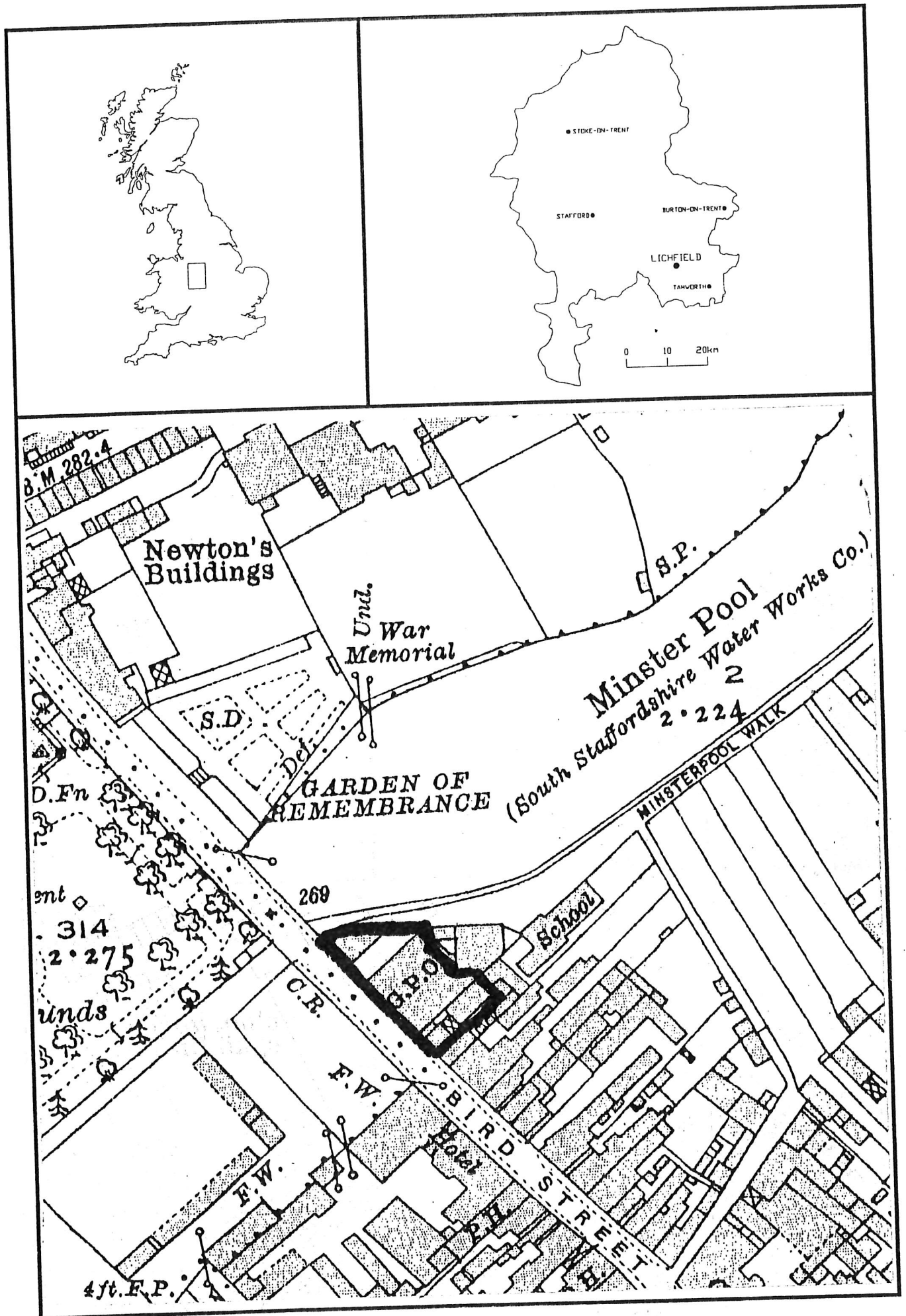


Fig. 1 Location of the site (1923 Ordnance Survey map)

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*Summary*

*Salvage recording was carried out during the excavation by engineers' contractors of observation pits at The Arts Centre, Bird Street, Lichfield. Deep waterlogged deposits were revealed, including survival of leather and wood. These deposits date back at least to the medieval period and it is possible that earlier remains survive. Further evaluation work is envisaged.*

## **1 Introduction**

Lichfield District Council is proposing to develop the Lichfield Arts Centre (Planning Application 99/00108/FUL). The site lies on the eastern side of Bird Street, directly south of Minster Pool (NGR: SK 115 096) (Fig. 1). As part of the project, site investigation works were to be carried out by the project engineers. The Local Planning Authority's Archaeological Advisor recommended that the observation pits should be observed in order to give a pre-evaluation assessment of the archaeological resource. Marches Archaeology was commissioned to undertake the archaeological element of the project. The fieldwork was carried out on 4 March 1999.

## **2 Scope of the project**

Three observation pits were excavated by the engineers' contractors. Outline observations and recording of any significant archaeological remains that were present were made by Marches Archaeology. For ease of recording the engineers' pit numbers were used (Fig. 2). Additionally, a number of probe holes were sunk. These were not recorded archaeologically.

A brief report was to result and no documentary study was required. Further archaeological work on the site, in the form of an evaluation excavation, is envisaged by the Local Planning Authority's Archaeological Advisor.

## **3 Outline history**

Although there is strong evidence for continuous human exploitation in the area around Lichfield since prehistoric times (Hodder, 1982), in Lichfield itself very little evidence has been recovered. Excavation has revealed five mesolithic flints at St Michael's church (SK 124 095) and occupation layers ascribed to the Neolithic period south of the cathedral (Carver, 1982a, 2). However, there is scant evidence for settlement in the later prehistoric period, and it is possible that swampy conditions in the area were a limiting factor.

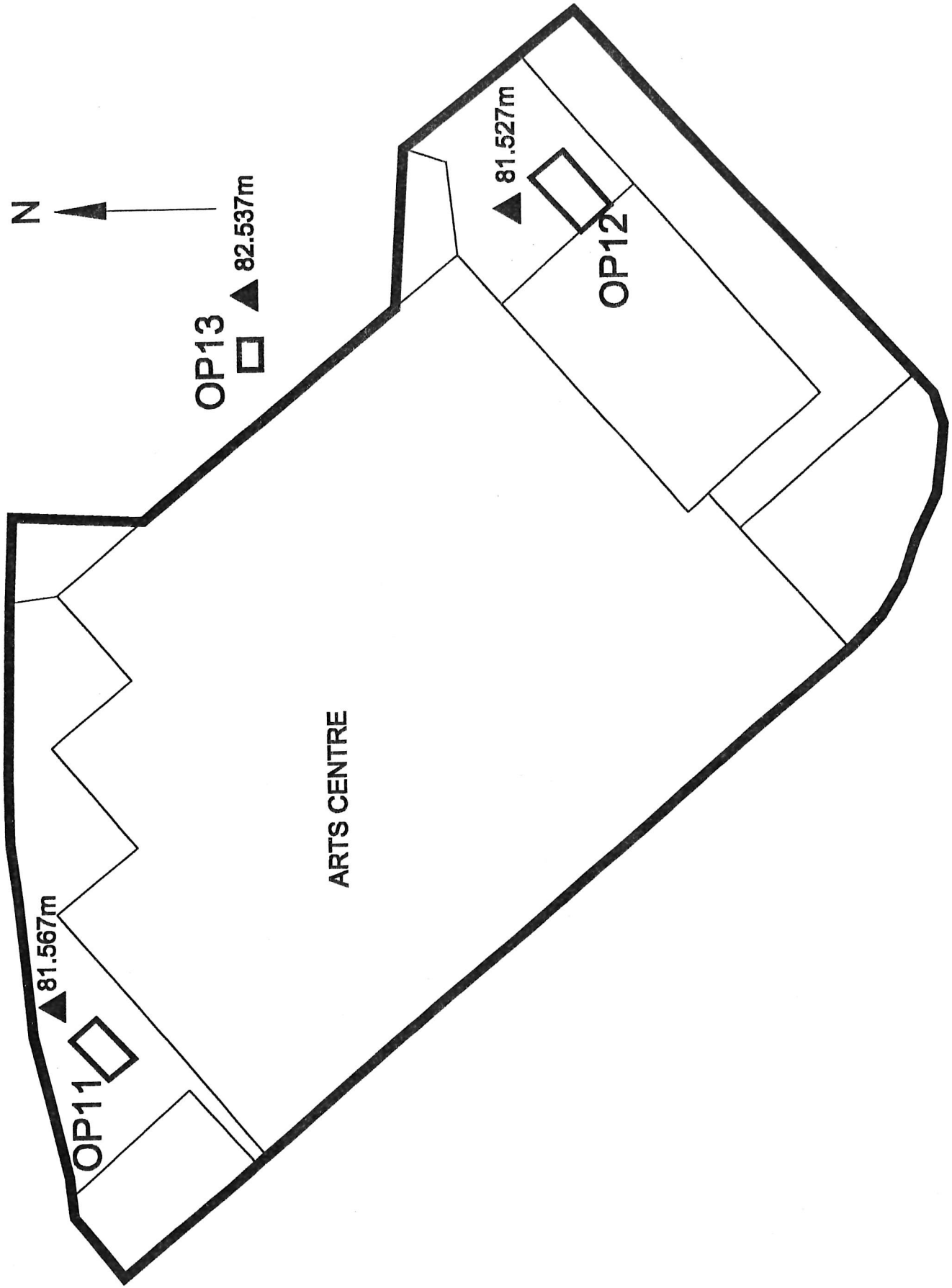


Fig. 2 Approximate location of the trenches

It has been suggested that during the Roman period a settlement focusing on some sort of religious structure was in existence (Bassett, 1982, 98). Indeed, a Roman burial in Beacon Street was excavated (Harwood, 1802), though other archaeological evidence for this period is sparse.

In *circa* 670 Bishop Chad founded his episcopal seat at '*lyccidfelth*' Lichfield (Bede, 1968) and a cathedral was built there *circa* 700 by a later bishop, Headda. The settlement associated with this cathedral is believed to have been quite small and centred around the cathedral itself (Studd, 1982, 31). However, Lichfield became an important pilgrimage site to St. Chad during this period and it has been argued that "it seems inconceivable that this scale of activity produced no more than a scattered hamlet about the pre-Norman cathedral" (Slater, 1986, 13-14).

Lichfield continued to be the seat of the bishopric until 1075 when it was moved to Chester (*op. cit.*, 11). At this time the town of Lichfield is believed to still have been centred around the cathedral but there was a further development around the church of St Michael's to the east and a possible further settlement in Lower Sandford Street to the west (Taylor, 1969, 49). However, the town was still a small settlement and it was not until the middle years of the 12th century, when a new town was created, that Lichfield grew in size. The new town was created to the south of the cathedral and Minster Pool. A new church, St Mary's, was built to serve the settlement.

The scant archaeological material from the 13th and 14th centuries has been seen to represent stagnation during this period (Carver, 1982a, 4), although the documentary evidence does not back up this theory as a survey of the bishop's estates in 1298 states that there were 286½ burgages (Beresford, 1967, 68). Perhaps a lack of archaeological excavation gives a false representation of medieval Lichfield.

In the post-medieval period the main market-place was replanned, some of the streets were widened and some of the roads leading into Lichfield were improved or replaced (Bassett, 1982, 118). The town continued to prosper in the post-medieval period and many of the medieval houses have been either modernised or replaced by more recent buildings.

#### **4 The study area**

The site lies to the south of one of the town's medieval mill ponds, Minster Pool. Directly to the east is a Georgian building, Minster House. Minster Pool formed the southern edge of the Cathedral Close when it was created. Carver argued for a 12th century origin for the pool as part of the layout of the new town (Carver, 1982b, 38), whereas Slater suggested the pools were in existence by at least the 11th century and could have been dug much earlier (Slater, 1986, 15). Originally a ferry would have crossed the Minster Pool, which continued even after 1310 when a causeway was erected adjacent to the site at the northern end of Bird Street, which was the main north-south route (Gould, 1976, 10). Slater proposed that burgage plots grew up either side of the northern end of Bird Street and that they were in existence before the new town was planned in the 12th century (Slater, 1986, 24). The area of the site represents one of these burgage plots fronting onto Bird Street.

Previous archaeological observations in Minster Pool and its vicinity have revealed waterlogged 'peat' deposits, which have included remains such as a Saxon spiral-headed pin (during draining in 1857), pottery, leather, wood and horn cores (Carver, 1982a, 5-7 [Catalogue 1.1, 1.7, 1.18, 4.1, 5.2, 5.11]). Investigations to the north of the present extent of the Minster Pool revealed that it was originally wider than at present and recorded the top of the early medieval pool bed at a depth of approximately 79.3m O.D. with the top of the post-Conquest pool bed at a depth of approximately 79.7m O.D. (Carver, 1982b, Figs. 3 and 6, between pages 60 and 61). The top level of Minster Pool at the time of these observations was 80.12m O.D. It has been concluded by that author that "it seems likely that the strip to the south side of the Minster Pool, complementary to that to the north, will play an important part in the future successes of archaeology" (*op. cit.*, 4).

Further research should be carried out as part of any evaluation in order to inform the research agenda for fieldwork and post-excavation assessment and analysis.

## **5 Description of the archaeological observations**

### *5.1 Background*

The scope of the project allowed only for outline recording of the stratification. Observations were limited to a short period of time and because of the depth and narrowness of the observation pits it was not possible, within the constraints of Health and Safety requirements, to retrieve detailed information about the deeper deposits. Annotated sketch sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 of the observation pits (Fig. 3).

### *5.2 OP 11*

Beneath the modern make-up layers [15], was a dark brown sandy silt [16] which resembled a garden soil. A reddish brown clayey sandy silt containing charcoal [17] directly under this could be a subsoil. Beneath this there was a thin layer of brownish sandy silt with frequent lenses of mortar, brick, tile and charcoal within it [18]. This could be a demolition spread. Under this was a dark brown grey sandy silt with occasional brick, tile, charcoal and mortar flecks [19]. A fragment of bottle glass recovered from this layer is probably of 18th or 19th century date. Again this could be a buried garden or cultivation soil. The layer underneath, a mottled red brown sandy silt with clay patches and charcoal [20], could be a subsoil. A mid brown sandy silt with occasional mortar and charcoal flecks [21] was directly below this. Under this there was a reddish brown sandy silt with sandstone fragments, rounded pebbles and charcoal and mortar flecks [22]. A very mixed layer underneath could represent a demolition spread as it contained very frequent brick, tile and sandstone fragments, mortar and charcoal flecks in a matrix of a dark grey black sandy silt [23]. A fragment of window glass from this deposit is probably from the 18th or 19th century.

Below this there was a very thick layer of dark brown black organic material [24]. This contained some small bi-valve shells and occasional well rounded cobbles. Presumably this represents waterlogging. A layer of organic material with occasional pinky orange and grey blue sandstone fragments was below this [25] and this became sandier towards the base. Another layer of organic material with coarse gravels and occasional small bi-valves [26]

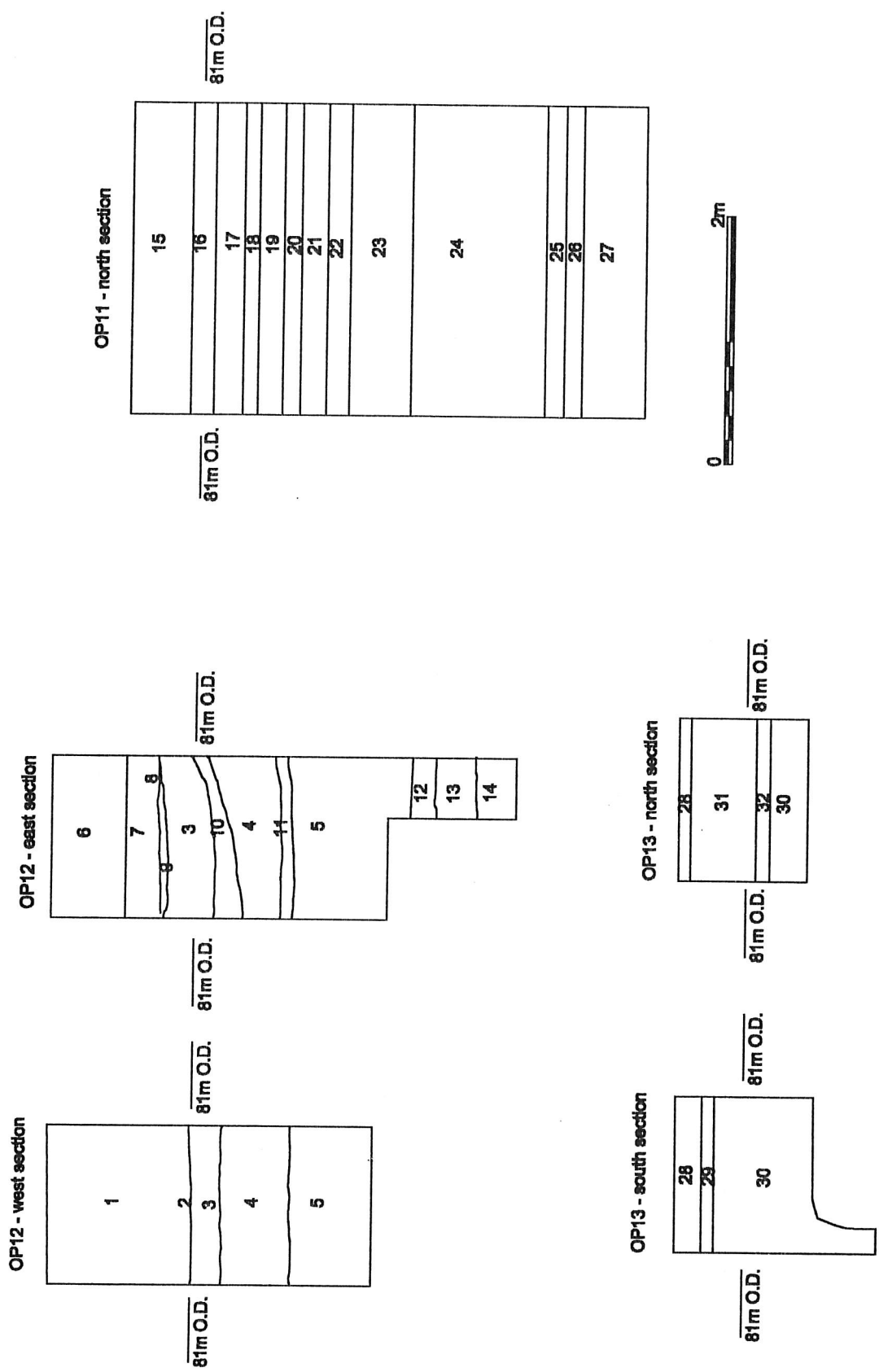


Fig. 3 Sections of the trenches



predated this. Under this there was a layer of light grey fine sand [27]. Possibly layers [25], [26] and [27] represent waterlogging from a marshy area or the changing course of a stream.

Brick footings for a post-medieval building were seen in the south west corner of the pit but these were not recorded.

### 5.3 *OP 12*

In the western portion of the pit the foundations for the Arts Centre were observed [1] and [2], in the eastern end, the yard surface and make-up layers were visible [6]. Directly underneath this and contemporary with it was a drain [7] and [8]. Below the drain was a thinnish lens of sandy silt with frequent brick, tile and mortar fragments [9]. This did not continue to the western end of the pit so it is possible that it is contemporary with the drain itself. Underneath this, throughout the pit, was a dark grey black sandy organic material with frequent charcoal flecks and smears and occasional brick, tile, mortar and shell flecks [3]. A band of grey brown sandy silty organic material with frequent inclusions of brick, tile, mortar and charcoal [10] underlay this in the east. This could represent some sort of demolition activity.

Beneath this was a thickish deposit of mid red brown sandy silty organic material throughout the pit and contained moderate brick and tile fragments, occasional pebbles, mortar, charcoal and patches of pinkish clay [4]. A sherd of medieval pottery and some shoe leather were recovered from this layer. Underneath [4], in the east, was a layer of mid red brown decayed organic material [11], possibly the remains of rushes. Under this and over all of the pit was a thick deposit of dark grey black organic material with occasional sand, brick, tile, charcoal and sandstone fragments and flecks [5]. Below this was a band of medium grey green coarse sand with some coarse gravel sized nodules which became finer towards the base [12]. Another deposit of organic material underlay [12] though this was mottled and contained some fine sand [13]. The earliest layer excavated was an homogenous fine sand. This sequence of organic deposits and sandy deposits probably represents waterlogging of the site. Whilst excavating this pit the workmen found some leather, tile, butchered bone and post-medieval pottery which they stated came from a depth of about 1.80m below the slab.

### 5.4 *OP 13*

Below the slab and make up layers [28] was a surface made out of sandstone blocks [29]. In the north of the pit this surface appeared to butt up against a brick foundation [31]. This foundation sat on a layer of sandstone blocks [32]. These footings were not keyed in to the house to the west, Minster House, but neither were they truncated by it. It is probable that they are contemporary and formed an outbuilding for Minster House. The brick, tile and mortar rubble layer below the foundations and yard surface is presumably demolition rubble that has been levelled to build the brick structure on and used as backfill in the foundation trenches. No finds were recovered from this pit.

### 5.5 *Other Observations*

A number of probe holes were also excavated on the site. In one of these, in the southern corner, sandstone was observed at a depth 0.60m below the slab. Although this could be the natural underlying rock it may in fact be the remains of a man made structure.

## 6 Finds

The nature of the salvage recording did not allow for a comprehensive collection policy. Where possible, deposits were swiftly investigated with a view to retrieving artefacts which were either datable or would provide other significant information. Table 1 shows the finds retrieved. This is a very small assemblage of material but contains interesting information, which will inform the research agenda for any further archaeological study of the site.

The unstratified material from OP12 was recovered by the engineers' contractors and is believed to come exclusively from the lower, waterlogged deposits. The materials present (e.g. wood and leather) and the soil adhering to the artefacts tends to confirm this.

It is provisionally considered that the shoe leather is medieval in date. The presence of a possible leather manufacturing waste piece is of particular significance as this may indicate leather working within or close to the area of the proposed development. Similarly, the single piece of slag, which has fired clay adhering to it, may suggest some form of industrial process in the vicinity. It is possible that this could be kiln waste from ceramic manufacture, but a superficial look at the fired clay suggests that there is no temper in the clay and it may be a natural deposit.

To find butchered bone is not unusual, particularly in a town location. Likewise, medieval pottery is to be expected at such a site. Both fragments of medieval pottery, however, were larger than is normally found.

Context	Trench	Category	Quantity	Comments
Unstratified	OP12	Animal bone	9	all waterlogged 1 sheep/goat horn 1 with butchery marks
Unstratified	OP12	Pottery	1	?late medieval jar or flagon
Unstratified	OP12	Slag or clinker	1	with fired clay adhering - possible manufacturing debris
Unstratified	OP12	Roof tile	2	probably post-medieval
Unstratified	OP12	Leather	8	one complete shoe sole, three probable shoe fragments, others uncertain. Probably medieval
Unstratified	OP12	Wood	1	30mm diameter, cut diagonally at each end - probably discarded piece
4	OP12	Pottery	1	medieval
5	OP12	Leather	7	at least one shoe sole fragment. One piece may be manufacturing waste
19	OP11	Bottle glass	1	18th or 19th century
23	OP11	Window glass	1	probably 19th century

**Table 1 List of finds**

In summary, the assemblage of artefacts suggests that the area from which they came (almost exclusively OP12) was waterlogged when the artefacts were deposited and has remained so ever since. This gives the site a good potential for the recovery of material discarded by past residents of the area. The preservation within waterlogged deposits adds value to this potential.

## **7 Discussion**

The recording in OP 11 revealed deposits believed to be of medieval date at a depth of approximately 79.4m O.D. (2.2m below present ground level). In OP 12 the date of layer 4 is uncertain, but it may be medieval. The top of this layer was at 80.8m O.D. and the bottom at 80.2m O.D. (1.2m and 1.9m respectively below present ground level). In OP 13 no medieval or earlier deposits were noted. The base of this pit was 79.9m O.D. (1.6m below present ground level).

The deposits recorded attest to human occupation or activity from at least the medieval period onwards on the site. The evidence suggests that significant archaeological remains may also be preserved below the foundations of the present building.

It can be surmised that during the medieval period and earlier, the area was probably marshy or formed part of a watercourse or pool. It could be that the Minster Pool was in fact larger than it is now and it was not narrowed until later. Survival rates for some types of artefact, like leather, wood and cloth, are very good in these sorts of deposits so the archaeological potential is high.

It is possible that the post-medieval deposits have been truncated by modern construction or that they were not recognised. It seems more than likely that there was occupation on the site during the post-medieval period and this is confirmed by the recovery of post-medieval artefacts from OP 12. Although the salvage recording did not establish the nature of the post-medieval occupation, map evidence (John Snape in 1781) indicates that the site was largely not built up in the latter part of the 18th century (Fig. 4). This map also notes that the path to the north of the site was then called 'New Walk'. This may suggest that changes were made to the extent of Minster Pool in the 18th century.

## **7 Conclusions**

The salvage recording has provided very useful information about the archaeological significance of the site. It appears that medieval, and possibly earlier, remains are well preserved for a depth of at least 1.8m below the post-medieval and modern levels. The presence of a Neolithic occupation site to the north of Minster Pool suggests that the area was viable for settlement during the prehistoric period and this should be considered for any further investigation of this site. The waterlogging of the deeper levels gives particular importance to the site and the tentative identification of manufacture of leather goods and perhaps also of ceramics warrants particular attention.

If no further archaeological fieldwork is proposed the artefacts recovered should be properly conserved. The leather in particular should be conserved within a short timescale. After

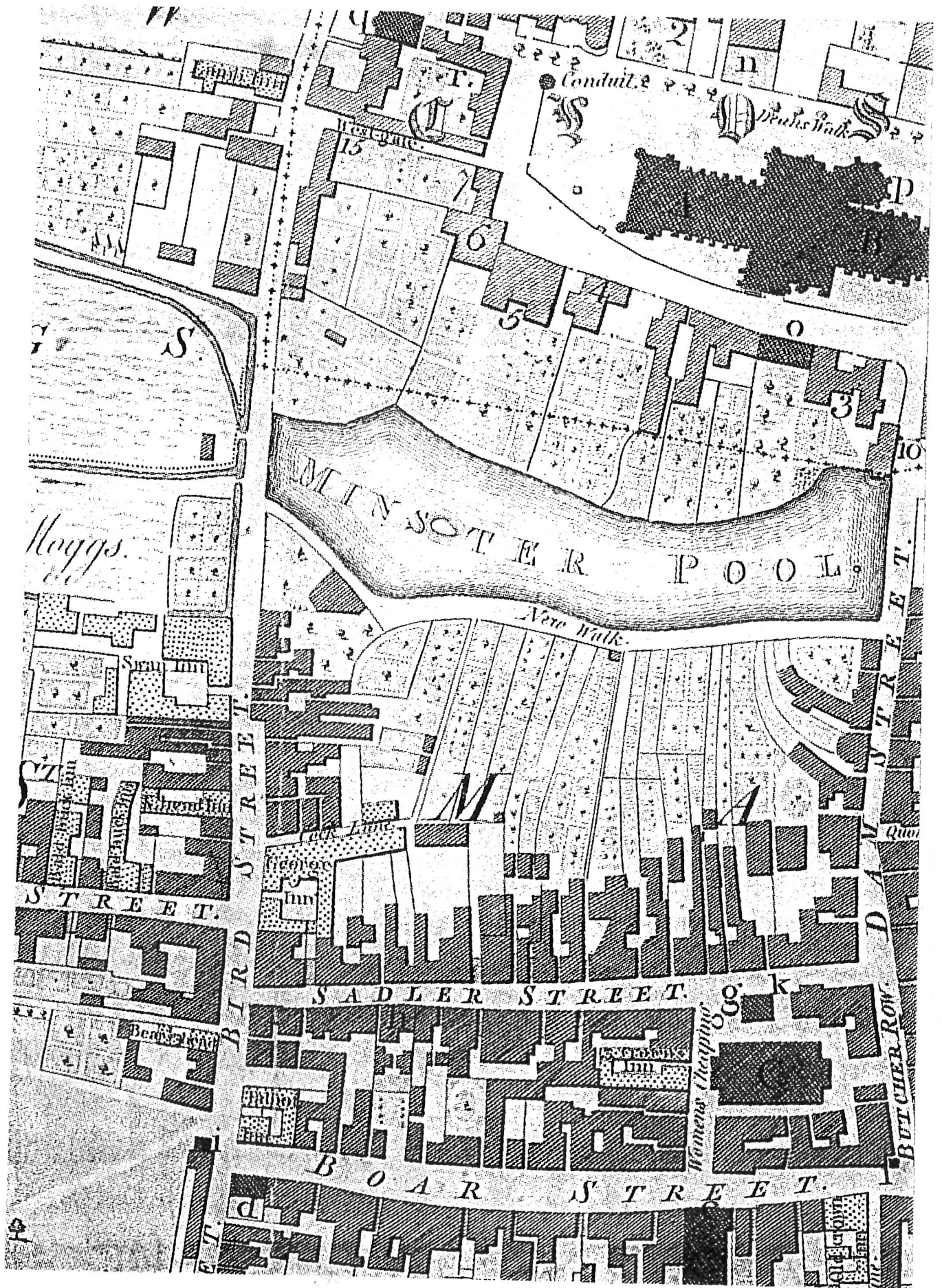


Fig. 4 Detail of John Snape's map of Lichfield, 1781

conservation the artefacts should be analysed and the results of the salvage recording published in an appropriate journal. If further archaeological fieldwork is to be carried out this study and publication would more appropriately be incorporated within the wider project.

The cursory nature of the archaeological work did not allow for the nature of the occupation to be adequately established. It is not clear, for instance what the origin of the waterlogging was. It could be natural marsh, a stream course or an impounded pool. The limits of the waterlogging have not been identified. The significance of the sandstone in the probe hole at the south of the site is not understood. If this is the level of bedrock there are questions about the form of the geology - or man's adaptation of it - which need to be addressed. If, on the other hand, it is not natural but part of a man made structure its date, form and function should be assessed. If this is part of a medieval causeway or bridge it may be of regional importance.

The site evidently has high archaeological potential and, on the basis of the evidence recovered from the salvage recording, is of at least local importance. Further evaluation work could establish more precisely the extent, nature, date and significance of the archaeological remains. This could well indicate that the archaeological resource of the site is of regional, if not national, importance.

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