

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EXCAVATION
AT
ASTON TAVERN, ASTON HALL
ROAD, BIRMINGHAM



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Appendix 1 Technical information

Archaeological excavation at Aston Tavern, Aston, Birmingham

Authors Tom Rogers and Tim Cornah

With contributions by Laura Griffin, and Derek Hurst

Summary

An archaeological excavation was undertaken on behalf of Birmingham City Council at Aston Tavern, Aston, Birmingham (NGR 40837, 28989). Planning permission was granted for the erection of two storey side and single storey rear extensions and associated works to the rear of Aston Tavern, Aston Hall Road (ref: 2012/07962/PA), subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works.

The site lies within the former beer garden to the rear of Aston Tavern a substantial early 20th century brick pub currently undergoing refurbishment. The Tavern stands to east of the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, a 19th century replacement of an earlier church within the former village of Aston and adjacent to a former meander of the River Tame. The proposal for development was therefore considered to have the potential to affect medieval and post medieval deposits associated with this settlement.

A rectangular area to the rear of the former tavern was stripped of overburden by mechanical excavator to reveal sands and gravels on a steep north facing slope, at the base of which sandstone bedrock was exposed. Subsequent hand excavation revealed three broad phases of archaeological activity.

Two intercutting medieval ditches were recorded crossing the eastern side of the excavation area from north to south. Pottery from these ditches was dated early 13th and early 14th centuries. Crossing the centre of the excavation on a similar line, the base of a medieval stone wall was recorded, set within a wide construction cut or ditch. This is interpreted as a boundary wall relating to the properties fronting onto the former village street to the south, or the remains of a building. Pottery from the fill of this ditch was dated to the 15th or 16th Centuries.

Post medieval deposits chiefly comprised a series of intercutting pits with largely sterile fills. These are thought to have been dug for the extraction of sand and gravel and backfilled soon after. A probable tree bowl is evidence of the use of the plot as an orchard during this period. Modern deposits comprised substantial amounts of material imported to level the beer garden, structures relating to the use of the pub and waste demolition material dumped on the site after the closure of the pub.

The survival of remains associated with Medieval Aston is significant and contributes to a growing body of evidence relating to settlement in the vicinity of Birmingham. Of the former medieval villages and hamlets in Birmingham, only Kings Norton and Minworth Greaves have previously been investigated by archaeological excavation.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological excavation was undertaken on behalf of Birmingham City Council (the Client) at Aston Tavern, Aston, Birmingham (NGR 40837, 28989). Planning permission was granted for the erection of two storey side and single storey rear extensions and associated works to the rear of Aston Tavern, Aston Hall Road (ref: 2012/07962/PA), subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works.

The proposal was considered to have the potential to affect medieval and post medieval deposits associated with the village of Aston (MBM2302).

The project conforms to a brief prepared by Mike Hodder of Birmingham City Council (2013) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WA 2013).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological excavation* (IfA 2008) *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008),

The event reference for this project, given by the Birmingham City Council HER is EBM634.

2 Aims

The aims of the project were as follows:-

- To identify, record and establish the form and date of domestic and other structures and deposits relating to the former village;
- To recover and analyse remains of past environmental conditions;
- To recover and analyse industrial residues;
- To relate the historic development of the site to the historic development of this part of Birmingham;
- To contribute to the aims of the West Midlands Regional Research Framework for Archaeology

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was undertaken by Tim Cornah (BA) who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2007 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004. He was assisted in the field by Pete Lovett (BSc) who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2012 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (M.Sc.). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt. Laura Griffin (post medieval pottery) and Derek Hurst (medieval pottery) contributed the finds report.

3.2 Documentary research

A search was made of Birmingham City Historic Environment Record (HER) of heritage assets within 500m radius of Aston Tavern.

3.3 List of sources consulted

Cartographic sources

- John Tomlinson, map of Aston Manor 1758

- Town Plans Birmingham (including Smethwick 1:500 1889)

Documentary sources

Published and grey literature sources are listed in the bibliography.

3.4 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2012a). Fieldwork was undertaken between 18th March and 4th April 2013. As a first stage (Strip, map and Record) a rectangular excavation area measuring 24m x 16m (at base of excavation) was opened to the rear of Aston Tavern. Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket and under archaeological supervision. The features revealed were planned, surveyed and photographed. The location of the excavation area is indicated in Figure 2.

Following a meeting with the clients and Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist, Birmingham City Council, an excavation strategy was agreed and subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012a). No deposits suitable for environmental analysis were encountered during the excavation. On completion of excavation, the excavation area was reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

3.5 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.6 Artefact methodology, by Laura Griffin

3.6.1 Recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (WA 2012a; appendix 2).

3.6.2 Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date was produced for each stratified context. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. All information was recorded on a *pro forma* Microsoft Access 2000 database.

Artefacts from environmental samples were examined, but none were worthy of comment, and so they not included below, nor included in the Table 1 quantification.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and where possible referenced as appropriate by fabric type and form to the Warwickshire Medieval and Post Medieval pottery Type Series (Soden and Ratkai 1998), the Bull Ring, Birmingham type series (Ratkai 2009), and also, in the case of the post-medieval pottery, to the Worcestershire on-line fabric series (see <http://www.worcestershireceramics.org/#fabrics/list>; codes prefixed with 'W'). Any fabrics which could not be identified within the above have been described in full.

3.6.3 Discard policy

The following categories/types of material will be discarded after a period of 6 months following the submission of this report, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository):

- where unstratified

- modern pottery, and;
- generally where material has been assessed as having no obvious grounds for retention.

See the environmental section for other discard where appropriate.

3.7 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

4 The application site

4.1 Current land-use

The site is the former beer garden of Aston Tavern, a substantial early 20th Century brick built pub, currently undergoing refurbishment. The garden, which is enclosed by a brick wall, was at the time of excavation partially overgrown with scrub growing on a thick layer of dumped building rubble and waste (Plate 1).

4.2 Topography, geology and archaeological context

Aston Tavern (MBM2743) is located on the northern side of Aston Hall Road roughly 2 miles to the north of Birmingham city centre at a height of 100 metres AOD (Fig 1). It lies on glacial sands and gravels overlying Wildmoor and Bromsgrove sandstones. Alluvial deposits are known to the immediate north of the site along the former course of the river Tame (Ragg et al.1984).

The immediate vicinity of the tavern largely comprises industrial and open, formerly industrial ground. A large concrete flyover which carries the Aston Expressway (A38 (M)) runs immediately south of the site.

The site now occupied by Aston Tavern formerly lay in the centre of the small settlement of Aston (MBM2302) which was until the 19th Century, a village in rural Warwickshire (National Gazetteer 1868) in a large parish which stretched as far as Castle Bromwich.

Before the Norman Conquest Aston belonged to Earl Eadwin and in 1086 it was held by William FitzAnsculf, though throughout this Godmund was the sitting tenant. It was assessed at 8 hides and had woodland 3 leagues in length by half a league broad attached to it (VCH VII, 59). In 1203 the manor passed to Sir Thomas de Erdington, and in 1367 to the Holt family, in whose possession it remained for over 400 years.

Aston Hall (MBM103) which lies to the south west was built between 1618 and 1635 by Sir Thomas Holte. It is described in the Victoria County History as 'one of the more important of the large group of country mansions built in England during the first third of the 17th century'.

The house lies within Aston Park (MBM999) a substantial former deerpark, listed on the register of historic parks and gardens (List entry Number: 1219847). Some of the land for this park came in 1620, when Sir Thomas Holte enclosed a third of the manor, at the expense of the open common fields (Fairclough 1984). Large parts of the park were sold off in the 19th Century for housing but the remaining grounds include a number of elements relating to the seat including lodges (MBM465) and an 17th Century gabled stable block (MBM466). The house is now a community museum managed by Birmingham Museums Trust. A number of archaeological interventions have investigated 17th century and later deposits within Aston Park (EBM263, EBM264, EBM486) casting light on the former nature and function of these buildings. Excavations of the north service range of Aston Hall (Driver et al 2008) revealed the structural character of the range as well as the

various functions of the rooms which included a washhouse, brewhouse, bakehouse, laundry and dairy.

The Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul (MBM311), a medieval church substantially rebuilt in the late 19th century stands some 70m to the west of Aston Tavern. Tomlinson's 1758 map of Aston Manor (Figure 5) depicts Aston as a small settlement with the Aston Tavern site as one of a small row of houses to the north of the village street. The population is thought to have been around 100 strong in the early 1600's, with the road known as Aston Street (Fairclough 1984). On the south side of the road, a vicarage is depicted adjacent to the Holte Almshouses (MBM880) which were built in 1655-56 under the directions of Sir Thomas Holte and survived until the early 20th Century. The excavation described in this report is the first known to have investigated the medieval settlement of Aston.

The River Tame, which is now canalised and runs parallel to the railway line 100m to the north east of the site, is depicted performing a wide meander (MBM2918) to the north of the settlement, across what is now a large area of open ground immediately north of the site. A possible predecessor to the Aston Hall is shown as ponds which may represent a moated site (MBM813) adjacent to the river and another rectangular moat-like enclosure (MBM2155) is shown in an area which is now Electric Avenue to the north east of the tavern.

Aston Tavern was built in 1904 but replaced an earlier tavern which is depicted on the 1889 Town Plan of Birmingham as 'Old Aston Tavern'. Immediately to the west on this map a large building called Holte House formerly stood, beyond which was Westbrook House (MBM1002). This late medieval timber-framed building is recorded on the Birmingham Historic Environment Record as a possible Priest's House.

5 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figures 2-4.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

On the southern side of the site yellow sands and gravels were observed, consistent with the record of superficial glacial deposits. These sloped steeply towards the north where the underlying degraded red sandstone bedrock was observed. This slope is likely to be related to the former channel of the river Tame, although no obvious water erosion was apparent.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Medieval deposits

The earliest feature recorded on the site was a flat bottomed linear feature (146, 152) which crossed the eastern edge of the excavation area from north to south. This feature was up to 1.42m wide and up to 0.18m deep containing a loose reddish brown silty sand fill (145, 151) from which pottery dated between the early 13th and early 14th centuries was retrieved. This was in turn cut by a similar feature (144) lying immediately to the east which contained pottery of a similar date range.

Running roughly parallel to these ditches and 10m to the west, a wide, shallow ditch crossed the site in which the base of a wall survived. The ditch (105, 156, 158) was shallow and flat bottomed, up to 2.1m wide and up to 0.16m deep. It was filled by (104, 153, 154, 157) a mid to light orangey brown sandy silt, within which three stretches of the base of a wall (155, 159, 160) were recorded. The wall base was formed from 1-2 courses of angular sandstone blocks, largely roughly hewn but with occasional dressed stones included. The wall was not originally bonded and contained only the fill of the ditch around the stones. It survived up to 0.16m high. Pottery retrieved from these deposits was mainly of a domestic form, and dated to the 15th – 16th centuries.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Post-Medieval deposits

Four similar pits dating to the post medieval period were recorded on the western edge of the excavation area. Each was filled with similar material and appeared to have been backfilled soon after initial excavation.

Pit 132 which lay on the western edge of the excavation areas is also recorded as a sub rectangular cut, 4.36m long, 3.6m wide and 0.32m deep. It was filled by a moderate dark-brownish grey sandy silt (131) from which pottery with a date range of 1600-1800 was retrieved. This was cut by 130, a sub-rectangular pit 1.53m wide and 0.46m deep, filled by 129, recorded as a dark grey brown sandy silt from which pottery with a date range of 1500-1650 was retrieved. This feature was in turn cut by pit 128, a sub rectangular pit 1.38m wide filled by 127, a moderate brownish grey sandy silt.

Pit 142 (Plate 5), the most substantial of these pits, was oval in shape 2.98m long, 2.53m wide and 0.53m deep filled by 141, a mid grey brown sandy silt from which 18th Century pottery was retrieved. It was situated in the north west corner of the site.

A cluster of six post holes (Plate 4) was recorded cutting the southern end of ditch 104 cutting the southern end of the excavated length of medieval ditch 104. Of these two small heavily truncated postholes were post-medieval in date. Cut 122 was a shallow, sub rectangular post hole with a diameter of 0.31m. It was filled by 121, a soft mid-brownish grey silty sand containing 18th Century pottery. Posthole 124 was also sub-rectangular in shape with a diameter of 0.33m. It was filled by 123, a mid brownish grey silty sand from which 18th century pottery was retrieved.

Pit 103, a slightly curved feature 1.82m wide on the southern edge of the site was filled by a 102 a soft brownish grey sandy silt containing pottery dated between 1600 and 1750. This is the same feature as a slightly undercut irregular feature 162 which is slightly to the north and interpreted as a tree throw.

5.1.4 Phase 4: Modern deposits

Overlying the site, layer 101 was described as very mixed and made up of a large percentage of modern rubble building material such as brick, concrete and tarmac as well as other modern material such as wood, plastics and metals.

Below this was a thick layer of material (165) imported to level out the site and comprised of another very mixed deposit though mostly of a dark black sandy silt. It contained a large percentage of brick and black slag waste lenses as well as some other such as worked sandstone blocks and modern ceramics.

Seven modern postholes (108, 114, 116, 118 and 120, Plate 4) were recorded on the site. Four of these (114, 116, 118, 120) were similar in size and formed an irregular rectangle cutting the southern end of the exposed section of ditch 104. Medieval pottery was recovered from the fill (119) of posthole 120, but given the similarity to the nearby postholes and the fact that the feature was cut into a medieval context, it is considered that this material is residual in this context.

A rectangular post hole (108) approximately 0.4m square was cut into 110, a linear cut containing a soakaway pipe which crossed the centre of the excavation area from south to north. This cut an earlier but still modern, regular machine-dug linear feature which was not fully excavated due to its depth but is thought likely to have been dug to lay a pipe. Another pipe trench (126) was recorded running parallel to and just inside the western edge of the excavation area.

Two modern post holes (138 and 140) recorded close to the southern edge of the excavation are thought to be associated. Fill 137, a sandy silt contained a pottery sherd dated to the 16th-18th Centuries but this is considered to have been residual in this context. Both these post holes were cut by a modern squareish possibly machine cut negative feature (136) filled with building rubble (135) which was in turn cut by another pit (134) also full of loose building material (133).

5.2 Artefact analysis, by Laura Griffin

5.3 Artefactual analysis, by Laura Griffin and Derek Hurst

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1 and 2. The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of 143 sherds of pottery weighing 4475g. In addition fragments of tile, brick, glass and clay pipe stems were recovered. The group came from seventeen stratified contexts and could be dated from the medieval period onwards (see Table 1), apart from a possible sherd of Roman pottery. Using pottery as an index of artefact condition, this was generally good with the majority of sherds displaying moderate levels of abrasion.

period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	Count	Weight(g)
post-medieval	glass			2	4586
modern	metal	iron		2	228
post-medieval	ceramic		brick	3	2434
post-medieval	ceramic		clay pipe	15	43
?Roman	ceramic		pot	1	3
medieval	ceramic		pot	90	1160
late med/early post-med	ceramic		pot	5	98
post-medieval	ceramic		pot	49	3221
medieval	ceramic		roof tile	3	398
post-medieval	ceramic		roof tile	6	1982
post-medieval	glass		vessel	3	266
undated	glass		vessel	1	18
post-medieval	glass		window	1	4

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

5.3.1 Pottery

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (Table 2). Diagnostic sherds were dated by form type where possible, whilst remaining sherds were datable by fabric type to their general period or production span.

Roman

A single (abraded) sherd of Severn Valley type ware (157; fabric W12) was residual.

Medieval

A total of 90 sherds, weighing 1160g were identified as medieval, ranging from 13th to 16th century in date. Six contexts (104, 119, 143, 145, 153 and 157) could be seen to have a medieval *terminus post quem* based on the dating of the pottery within them. Location of this pottery also indicated the site to have been heavily truncated, with contexts of early 14th century date lying directly beneath the topsoil in some areas.

Fabric and form types present indicated this to be a domestic assemblage with a narrow range of vessel types identified. The majority of sherds were of local production, with 8 separate fabric types identified. Where possible, these have been cross-referenced as described in section 1.1.2 above. Non-local sherds consisted of 7 sherds of Southern white ware (fabric WW02; contexts 104 and 157).

Diagnostic sherds were largely from cooking pot forms and many of the body sherds displayed evidence of use over a fire in the form of soot deposits, indicating them to also be from vessels of this type. In addition, four jug sherds were also identified.

Local fabrics

Fabric A

Hard, handmade fabric with a coarse feel. Oxidised throughout but poorly mixed fabric with bands of white clay visible in break.

Inclusions: Abundant, ill-sorted, sub-angular multi-coloured quartz, <1.0mm

Occasional, well-sorted, angular black inclusions, <0.25mm

Rare, well-sorted, sub-angular red ?clay pellets, <0.50mm

Forms: Cooking pot

Date range: mid 11th-12th century

Fabric B

Hard, handmade fabric with a rough feel, black surfaces and a brown core.

Inclusions: Abundant, ill-sorted, sub-angular white quartz, <0.75mm

Occasional organic streaks, <1.0mm

Forms: Cooking pot

Date range: 13th century

Fabric C

Hard, handmade fabric with a sandy feel. Dark grey external surface, buff internal surface and mid grey core.

Inclusions: Frequent, well-sorted, sub-rounded quartz, <0.25mm

Common mica

Rare, well-sorted, rounded black inclusions, <0.50mm

Forms: cooking pot, jug

Date range: 13th- early 14th century

Concordance with Bull Ring report: Deritend R fabric group

Fabric D

Hard, handmade fabric with a sandy feel. Dark grey surfaces and a brown core.

Inclusions: Frequent, ill-sorted, sub-rounded quartz, <1.25mm

Occasional, well-sorted, rounded grey clay pellets, <1.0mm

Occasional, well-sorted, rounded red inclusions, <0.5mm

Rare, well-sorted, rounded black inclusions, <0.25mm

Forms: cooking pot

Date range: medieval

Fabric E

Hard, fine fabric with a smooth feel. Dark grey external surface, oxidised internal surface and a grey core.

Inclusions: Moderate, well-sorted, rounded quartz, <0.25mm

Common mica

Occasional, well-sorted, rounded grey clay pellets, <1.0mm

Occasional, well-sorted, rounded ?iron rich red inclusions, <0.5mm

Forms: cooking pot

Date range: 15th-16th century

Fabric F

Hard fabric with a sandy feel. Grey surfaces and greyish brown core.

Inclusions: Frequent, well-sorted, sub- angular quartz, <0.5mm

Rare organic inclusions

Micaceous

Forms: cooking pot, jug

Date range: 13th- early 14th century

Concordance with Bull Ring report: Deritend R fabric group

Fabric G

Hard fabric with a sandy feel. Thin-walled vessels, dark grey/black throughout with a highly micaceous, almost lustrous appearance in the break.

Inclusions: Moderate, well-sorted, rounded quartz, <0.25mm

Moderate, lenticular voids - ?organic inclusions

Forms: cooking pot

Date range: medieval

Concordance with Bull Ring report: cpj9

Fabric H

Hard, wheelthrown whiteware with a rough feel. White fired throughout with distinctive tooling to the internal surface giving the appearance of rills and similar to that seen on some Stamford ware. Glazed external surface, decayed to a pale yellowish olive colour.

Inclusions: Abundant, well-sorted, rounded pink and white quartz, <1.00mm

Occasional well-sorted, rounded, ?iron-rich red inclusions, <0.75mm

Forms: ?jug

Date range: medieval

Non-local fabrics

Non-local sherds consisted of 7 sherds of Southern white ware (fabric WW02; contexts 104 and 157).

Forms

Fabric and form types present indicated this to be a domestic assemblage with a narrow range of vessel types identified. Most of the sherds were from cooking pot forms, many of which had soot deposits on the external surface as a result of use. With the exception of a single cooking pot rim (context 157, fabric A), all diagnostic sherds could be paralleled with examples included in the Bull Ring report (Ratkai 2009).

The exception was notable for being of an earlier form than the rest of the assemblage. It was a handmade, heavily sooted cooking pot of small diameter and the only example of fabric type A identified within the group. Based on these attributes, the sherd has been dated to the mid 11th-12th century.

Two jug/pitcher forms were identified in local fabric types (contexts 104 and 145, fabric F and context 157, fabric C). Both were of fabrics thought to be of Deritend production but unglazed and had a wide strap handle decorated with stabbed decoration in a 'ladder pattern' characteristic of this ware (Ratkai 2009, 95). The dating of reduced Deritend fabrics and indeed, the jug forms has long been debated, with assemblages from Weoley Castle (Oswald 1964), the Bull Ring (Ratkai 2009) and Bridge End and Park House in Warwick (Ratkai 1990 and forthcoming) providing the best guide. Although no definitive dates for production of this fabric type has yet been confirmed, a rough date range of early 13th-early 14th century can be given.

Catalogue of the illustrated medieval pottery (Fig. 6)

1. Cooking pot (fabric E), 15th-16th century; context 104
2. Early cooking pot (fabric A), mid 11th-12th century; context 157
3. Jug/pitcher (fabric F), 13th-early 14th century; contexts 104 and 145

Fabric code	Count	Weight (g)
WW02	7	114
A	1	14
B	18	127
C	7	156
D	13	71
E	20	316
F	16	271
G	5	56
H	2	34

Table 2: Quantification of the medieval pottery by fabric type

Summary of the medieval pottery assemblage

The medieval pottery from this site falls into two main groups, which can be identified by the date ranges indicated by the forms present, and clearly relate to two separate areas of the site. The earliest of these groups can be dated between the early 13th and early 14th centuries and relates to the two medieval pit fills (143) and (145). The second group of material can be dated between the 15th-16th centuries and relate to fills (104), (153) and (157) which overlie the medieval ditch and base of the wall within it.

There is, therefore, an apparent gap in the pottery sequence between the early 14th and 15th centuries, but it is not considered that the pottery assemblage from the excavation is of sufficient size from which to draw conclusions on the continuity of settlement in this location.

Transitional medieval/post-medieval and later pottery

The finds assemblage included a small quantity of medieval/post-medieval (transitional), post-medieval and modern sherds. These were identified as mainly Midlands purple-type (fabric W78), and the later buff (W91) and red (W78) wares, which are all typical of this period in this area. There were also occasional sherds of Midlands yellow (W77), and delft ware (W82). The following is an account of this pottery up to c 1800 (ie omitting the modern material). Apart from spot-dating the deposits the pottery is only briefly discussed overall, as association with features seemed incidental, rather than the result of any concerted episode of rubbish accumulation or dumping.

Fabric common name	fabric code (Worcs)	fabric code (Warks)	count	weight(g)
Midlands yellow ware	W77	MY	1	4
Post-medieval red wares	W78	MB(and ?MP)	31	2004
Red ware (Cistercian-type)	W78.5	CIST	2	4
Nottingham stoneware	W81.3	STE02	1	16
Tin-glazed ware	W82	TGE	2	12
Post-medieval buff wares	W91	MB	7	332
Miscellaneous late stoneware	W81.4	-	2	544
Modern china	W85	MGW	4	214

Table 3 Quantification of post-medieval (top) and modern pottery (bottom)

Vessel types

The usual range of domestic vessel types was represented (mainly drinking vessels and bowls). No cooking wares were noted, presumably because metal vessels had largely been substituted for this purpose by this date. The most notable vessels comprised a candlestick, and a handled mug. A similar range of fabrics was seen for this period during the recent Bull Ring excavations in Birmingham city centre (Ratkai 2009, 101–2).

Provenance

Very little could be stated with any certainty about the source of most of the assemblage, which is typical of this period, but has been relatively little studied. Though, based on earlier material of the late 15th–16th centuries, some similarity was noted with Wednesbury (south Staffs) pottery fabrics (cf Hurst and Wright 2010, 88; Hurst and Wright 2011) for both the Midlands purple-type and late Cistercian-type forms from this site.

Date range

The dating of earlier post-medieval pottery is not that straightforward where material is so fragmentary. Some transitional Cistercian-type ware (context 157) and Midlands purple ware (context 129) likely to be of the later 15th–16th/17th centuries was noted to be present. Generally, however, it was the 17th–18th century that was best represented by this material.

Context	Fabric code	Fabric name	No. of sherds	Total weight (g)	Start date	End date	Period
101	STE	Miscellaneous late stoneware	2	544	1800	1950	post-medieval
101	MGW	Modern china	1	126	0	0	modern
101	MGW	Modern china	3	190	1800	1840	post-medieval
102	MB	Post-medieval red wares	6	888	1600	1700	post-medieval
102	MB	Post-medieval red wares	1	12	1600	1750	post-medieval
102	MB	Post-medieval red wares	1	44	1700	1800	post-medieval
102	MB	Post-medieval buff wares	2	148	1600	1700	post-medieval
102	MB	Post-medieval buff wares	1	40	1600	1750	post-medieval
104	B		7	26			medieval
104	B		6	52	0	0	medieval
104	B		1	10	E13C	1250	medieval

104	C		1	21			medieval
104	D		2	9	0	0	medieval
104	E		1	13			medieval
104	E		11	192	0	0	medieval
104	E		4	54	15C	16C	medieval
104	F		4	6			medieval
104	F		4	25	0	0	medieval
104	F		1	64	13C		medieval
104	G		2	16			medieval
104	H		2	34	0	0	medieval
104		Severn Valley ware	1	3			Roman
104	WW02	Southern white ware	3	28	15C	16C	medieval
119	B		1	16	0	0	medieval
119	F		1	13			medieval
121	MB	Post-medieval red wares	1	2	1700	1800	post-medieval
129	MB	Post-medieval red wares	2	56	1500	1650	post-medieval
131	C		1	12	0	0	medieval
131	G		1	6	0	0	medieval
131	MB	Post-medieval red wares	3	94	1500	1700	post-medieval
131	MB	Post-medieval red wares	1	206	1600	1700	post-medieval
131	MB	Post-medieval red wares	1	50	1600	1800	post-medieval
131	MB	Post-medieval red wares	1	84	1700	1800	post-medieval
131	MB	Post-medieval buff wares	1	14	1700	1800	post-medieval

137	TGE	Tin-glazed ware	1	6	1590	1730	post-medieval
141	MY	Midlands yellow ware	1	4	1600	1700	post-medieval
141	MB	Post-medieval red wares	1	288	0	0	post-medieval
141	MB	Post-medieval red wares	1	48	1600	1700	post-medieval
141	MB	Post-medieval red wares	2	36	1700	1800	post-medieval
141	STE02	Nottingham stoneware	1	16	1690	1790	post-medieval
141	TGE	Tin-glazed ware	1	6	1590	1730	post-medieval
141	MB	Post-medieval buff wares	1	50	1700	1800	post-medieval
143	F		1	12	M13C	E14C	medieval
145	D		4	10	0	0	medieval
145	E		2	20			medieval
145	F		1	126	13C		medieval
147	MB	Post-medieval red wares	1	2	1700	1800	post-medieval
147	MGW	Modern china	1	24	1780	1900	post-medieval
147	MISC	Miscellaneous medieval wares	1	1	0	0	medieval
153	D		1	30	0	0	medieval
153	E		1	7			medieval
153	F		2	14	E13C	1250	medieval
153	G		2	34			medieval
157	A		1	14	M13C		medieval
157	B		2	9			medieval

157	B		1	14	0	0	medieval
157	C		3	23	0	0	medieval
157	C		2	100	13C		medieval
157	D		5	14			medieval
157	D		1	8	0	0	medieval
157	E		1	30	0	0	medieval
157	F		2	11			medieval
157	WW02	Southern white ware	4	86	15C	16C	medieval
157	CIST	Cistercian ware	3	3	1500	1600	late med/early post-med
161	MB	Post-medieval red wares	4	24	0	0	post-medieval
161	MB	Post-medieval red wares	3	122	1550	1650	post-medieval
161	MB	Post-medieval red wares	2	48	1700	1800	post-medieval
161	MB	Post-medieval buff wares	2	80	1600	1700	post-medieval

Table 4: Quantification of the pottery by context

5.3.2 Other artefacts

Ceramic building material

A total of nine fragments of roofing tile and three pieces of brick were retrieved from the site. All were of post-medieval and modern date with the exception of a fragment of roof tile from post-hole fill (119), which was datable to the medieval period.

Clay pipe

A total of 15 clay pipe fragments were identified within the assemblage, all stem with the exception of a spurred bowl fragment from posthole fill (137).

Glass

All glass was post-medieval in date and consisted of fragments from 4 vessels, 3 from a single fill (context 141) and one fragment of window pane from the fill of a sand quarry pit (context 131). In addition to the glass itself, two large blocks of glass production waste were also retrieved from a posthole fill (context 117) and the topsoil (context 101).

Iron

Two fragments of iron were retrieved, both of modern date (context 135).

6 Synthesis

6.1 Roman

A single sherd of possibly Roman pottery was retrieved from ditch 105 (fill 104). This was highly abraded and is residual in this context, but may nonetheless be significant given the lack of other evidence for Roman activity in the vicinity.

6.2 Medieval

The survival of features from the medieval village of Aston is significant. The earliest feature recorded on the site was a shallow ditch (cuts 145, 150) which crossed from north to south on the eastern edge of the excavation area and was cut by a similar feature (146, 152) lying slightly to the west (fig 2). Both of these contained pottery which can be dated between the early 13th and early 14th centuries. Their function is not clear, although it is likely that they are the truncated remains of a system of drainage to the river.

The surviving three stretches of stonework (155,159 and 160) which also crossed the excavation area from north to south (fig 3), are insubstantial and rough implying they were the base of a wall, probably a property boundary which divided plots between the main street of the village and the edge of the River Tame.

Ditch 105 into which the wall was set would have been wide for a construction cut implying either that the ditch was the original boundary superseded by the wall or that the original wall was wider prior to robbing and formed part of a building (fig 4). Pottery retrieved from the fill of ditch 105 is dated to the 15th-16th Centuries and it is clear that the site, particularly in the light of its proximity to the church, was part of the medieval settlement of Aston, the root of the settlement that would later appear on Tomlinson's map of 1758 (fig 5). There is, however, a notable absence of evidence for 'standard' medieval backplot activity such as refuse pits and small scale industry, though it is likely that this area was simply too steep and close to the river for very intensive activity.

6.3 Post Medieval

Evidence of settlement activity continues into the post-medieval period. Two post holes (122,124) may have been part of a fence or other structure. Four pits (132,130,128,142), three of which were intercutting appeared to have been dug and backfilled rapidly. These are interpreted as extraction pits for the superficial deposits of sand and gravel. This may have been for maintenance of the road (until 1835 the responsibility of the parish) or as a building material.

It is notable that most of the pottery identified from this period came from drinking vessels and bowls as well as a candlestick and handled mug. The brick building currently standing is at least the second public house to have stood on this site and this may be evidence that some form of drinking establishment was established on this site in the 18th Century.

6.4 Twentieth Century

Most twentieth century activity within the site appears to relate to the functioning of Aston Tavern. Substantial amounts of material (101,165), largely rubble and industrial waste were imported to level the sloping ground to the rear of the pub and form a flat beer garden possibly in the first half of the century. The small cluster of post holes (114,116,118,120) to the south of the excavated area may represent some form of shelter. All other modern activity related to services to the transit of services to the pub from the north and the dumping of a large amount of building material after its closure.

6.5 Research frameworks

The survival of well preserved medieval remains from Aston demonstrate not only the potential of similar remains within Aston but also other former small settlements which now form part of the Birmingham conurbation. Of other former medieval villages within Birmingham, only Kings Norton

and Minworth Greaves have previously been investigated by archaeological excavation (Hodder 2013). Excavation at Minworth Greaves revealed ditches of comparable function and date to the medieval boundary ditches discovered at Aston Tavern, potentially demarcating crofts or paddocks (Pack 2001). The excavations at Kings Norton (Jones and Ratkai 1992) found evidence of timber – framed buildings dating to the 13th–14th centuries, most likely being of peasant standard. More recent excavations have revealed further knowledge of the construction methods of the medieval dwellings in the village (Hislop et al 2011). Three structures were discovered, again dating to the 13th-14th centuries, but likely being of a higher standard. Certainly Structure 1 "argues for a well-constructed...building, unlike some of the apparently ill-constructed rural dwellings" (Hislop et al 2011 p110). Shaw's paper considering the Black Country and Birmingham in the medieval period delivered as part of the West Midlands Regional Research framework identified the need for archaeological intervention carried out 'at a sufficiently large scale to determine definitely whether or not archaeological deposits do survive and if so their state of preservation'. He also noted that islands of preservation can survive even below intensively settled areas within the Birmingham conurbation. Hunt (2011) concurs with this view on large scale excavation, especially in contributing to the understanding of the evolution of rural settlement patterns. This excavation has shown the efficacy of large scale intervention (it is doubtful whether an evaluation of the site, for example, would have identified the nature of medieval deposits) and the good survival of medieval remains in an area which has seen considerable activity in the post-medieval and modern periods. Shaw also notes that there is a perception that the archaeology of the Black Country and Birmingham is only of interest for its post-medieval industrial archaeology. This excavation has demonstrated the good survival of medieval remains in Aston.

6.6 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication in *West Midlands Archaeology*. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological excavation was undertaken at Aston Tavern, Aston Hall Road, Birmingham (NGR 40837, 28989). It was undertaken on behalf Birmingham City Council (the Client), in response to a proposal (pre application reference: 2012/07962/PA) for the development of the site which includes the construction of single storey extensions around a yard to the rear of the building.

The site lies within the former beer garden to the rear of Aston Tavern a substantial early 20th century brick pub currently undergoing refurbishment. The Tavern stands to east of the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, a 19th century replacement of an earlier church within the former village of Aston and adjacent to a former meander of the River Tame. The proposal for development was therefore considered to have the potential to affect medieval and post medieval deposits associated with this settlement.

A rectangular area to the rear of the former tavern was stripped of overburden by mechanical excavator to reveal sands and gravels on a steep north facing slope, at the base of which sandstone bedrock was exposed. Subsequent hand excavation revealed three broad phases of archaeological activity.

Two intercutting medieval ditches were recorded crossing the eastern side of the excavation area from north to south. Pottery from these ditches was dated early 13th and early 14th centuries. Crossing the centre of the excavation on a similar line, the base of a medieval stone wall was recorded, set within a wide construction cut or ditch. This is interpreted as a boundary wall relating to the properties fronting onto the former village street to the south or the remains of a building. Pottery from the fill of this ditch was dated to the 15th or 16th Centuries.

Post medieval deposits chiefly comprised a series of intercutting pits with largely sterile fills. These are thought to have been dug for the extraction of sand and gravel and backfilled soon after. A probable tree bowl is evidence of the use of the plot as an orchard during this period. Modern

deposits comprised substantial amounts of material imported to level the beer garden, structures relating to the use of the pub and waste demolition material dumped on the site after the closure of the pub.

The survival of remains associated with Medieval Aston is significant and contributes to a growing body of evidence relating to settlement in the vicinity of Birmingham. Of the former medieval villages and hamlets in Birmingham, only Kings Norton and Minworth Greaves have previously been investigated by archaeological excavation.

7 Acknowledgements

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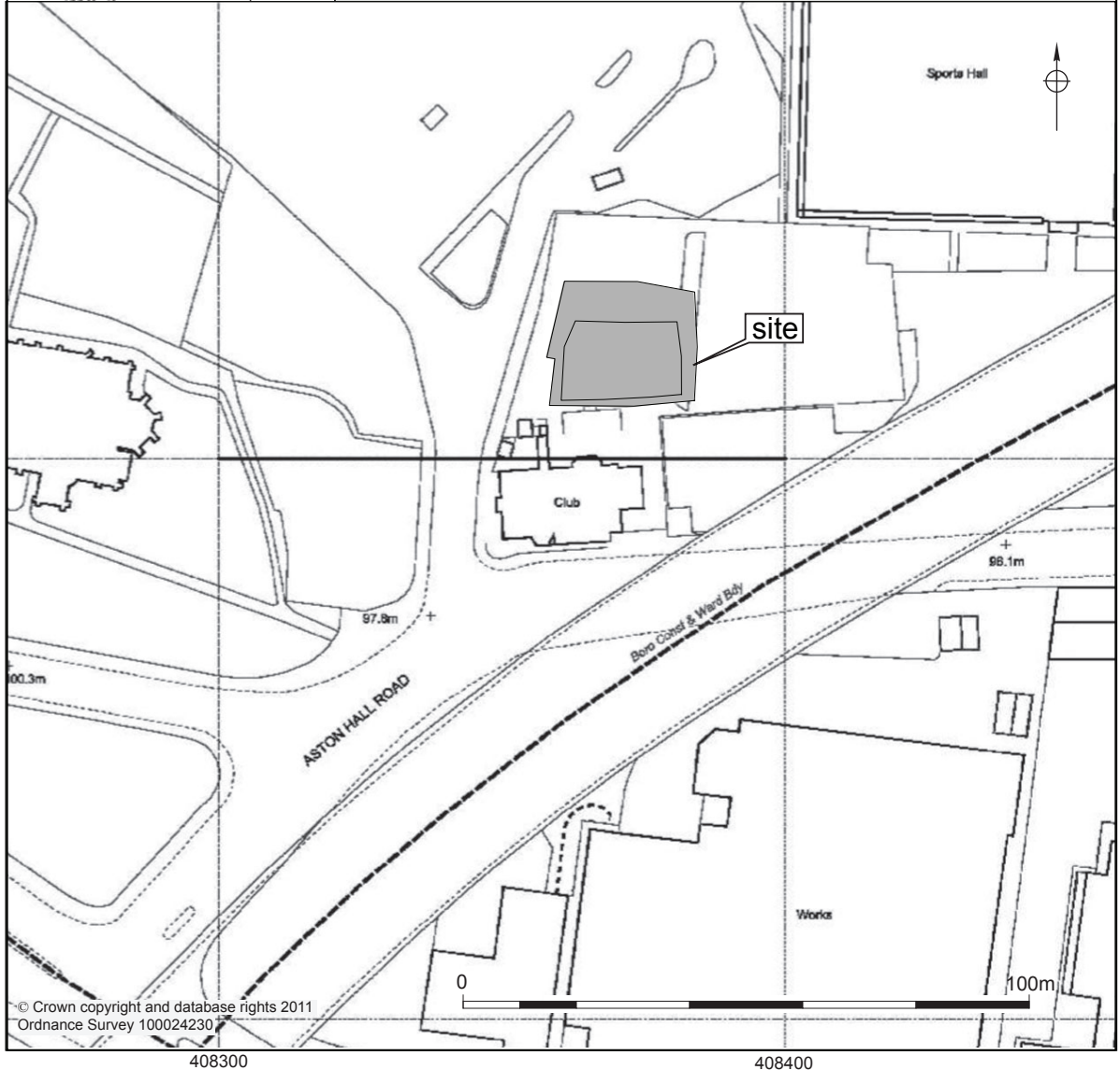
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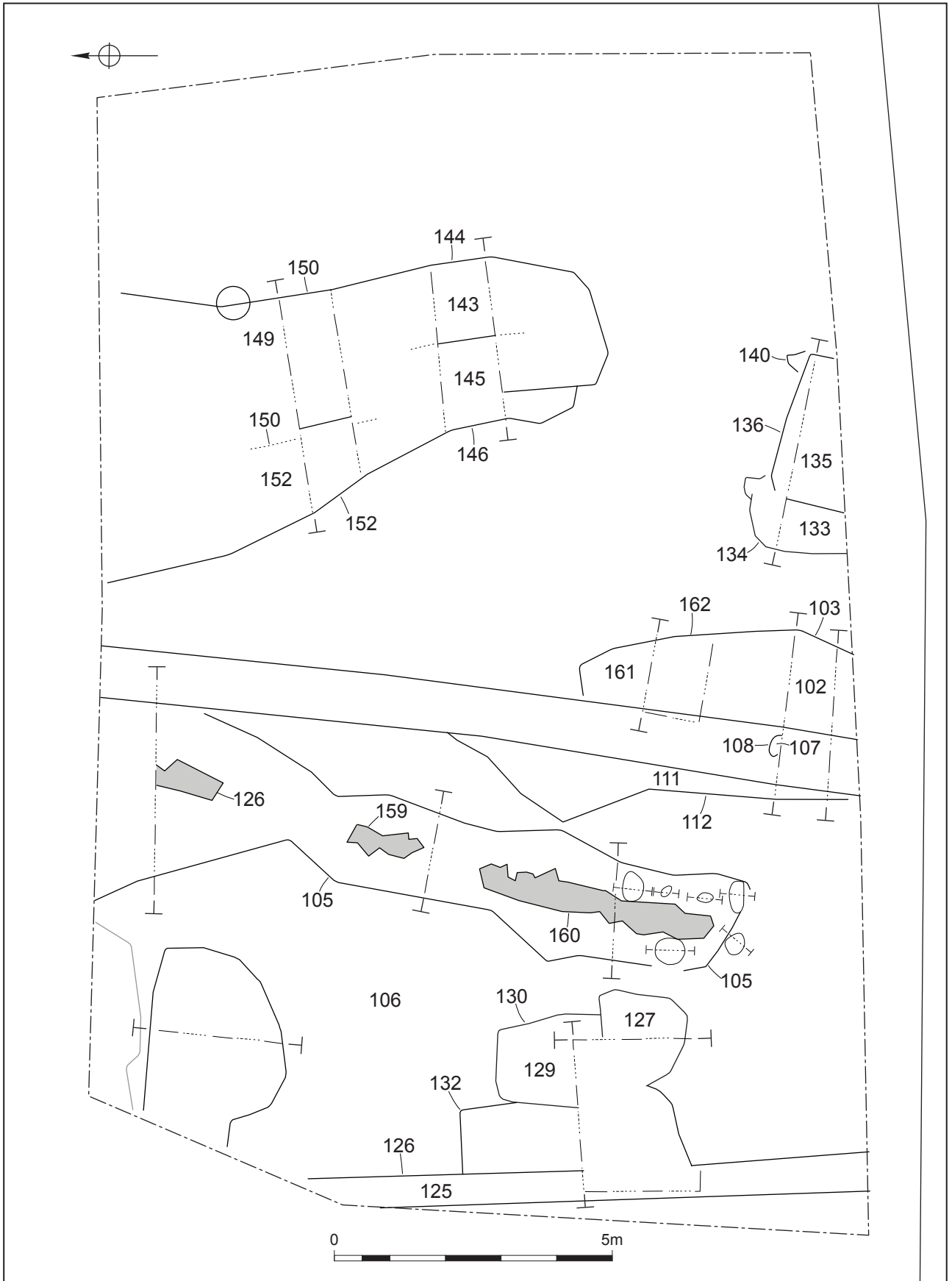
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Figures



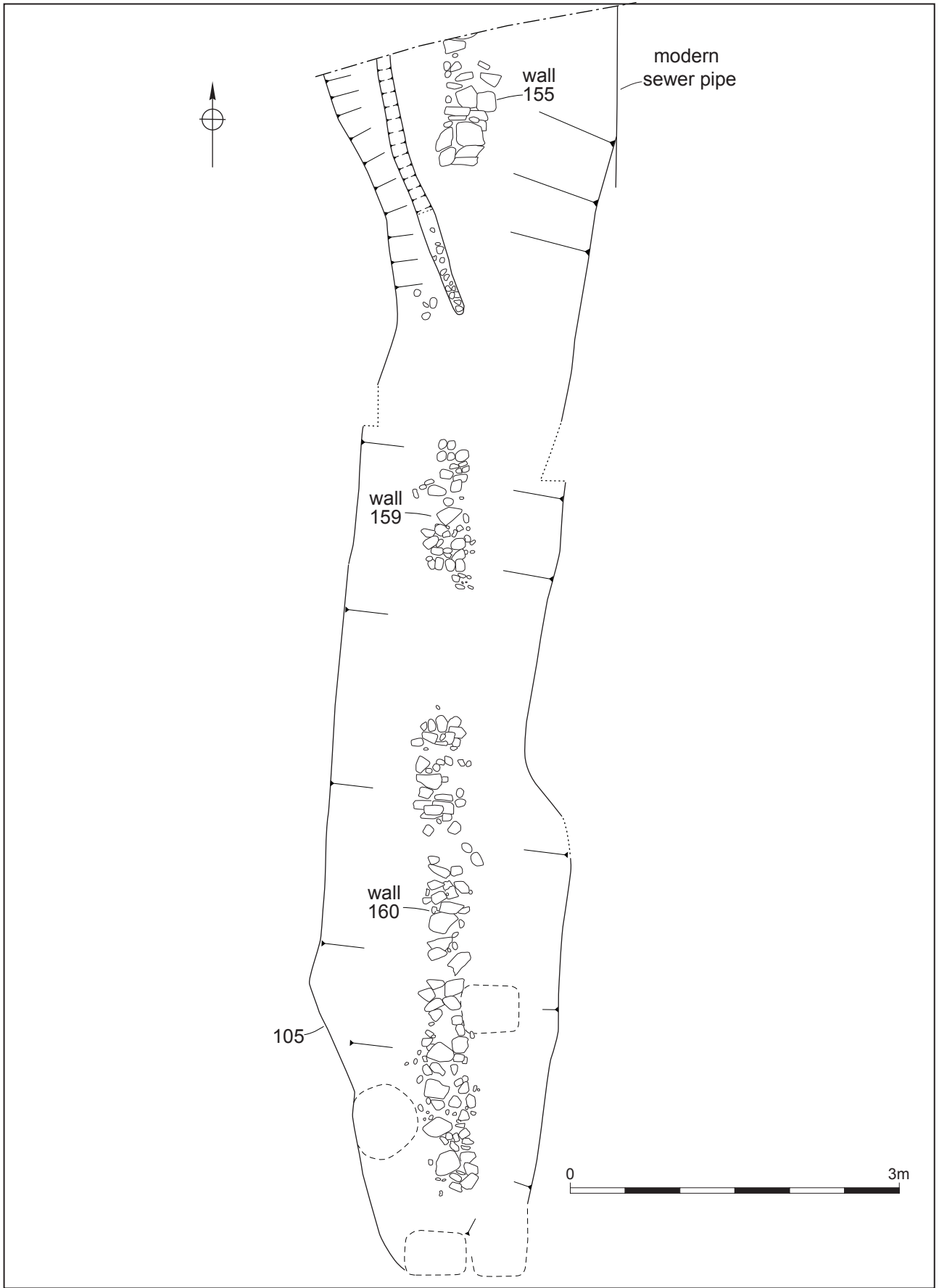
Location of the site

Figure 1



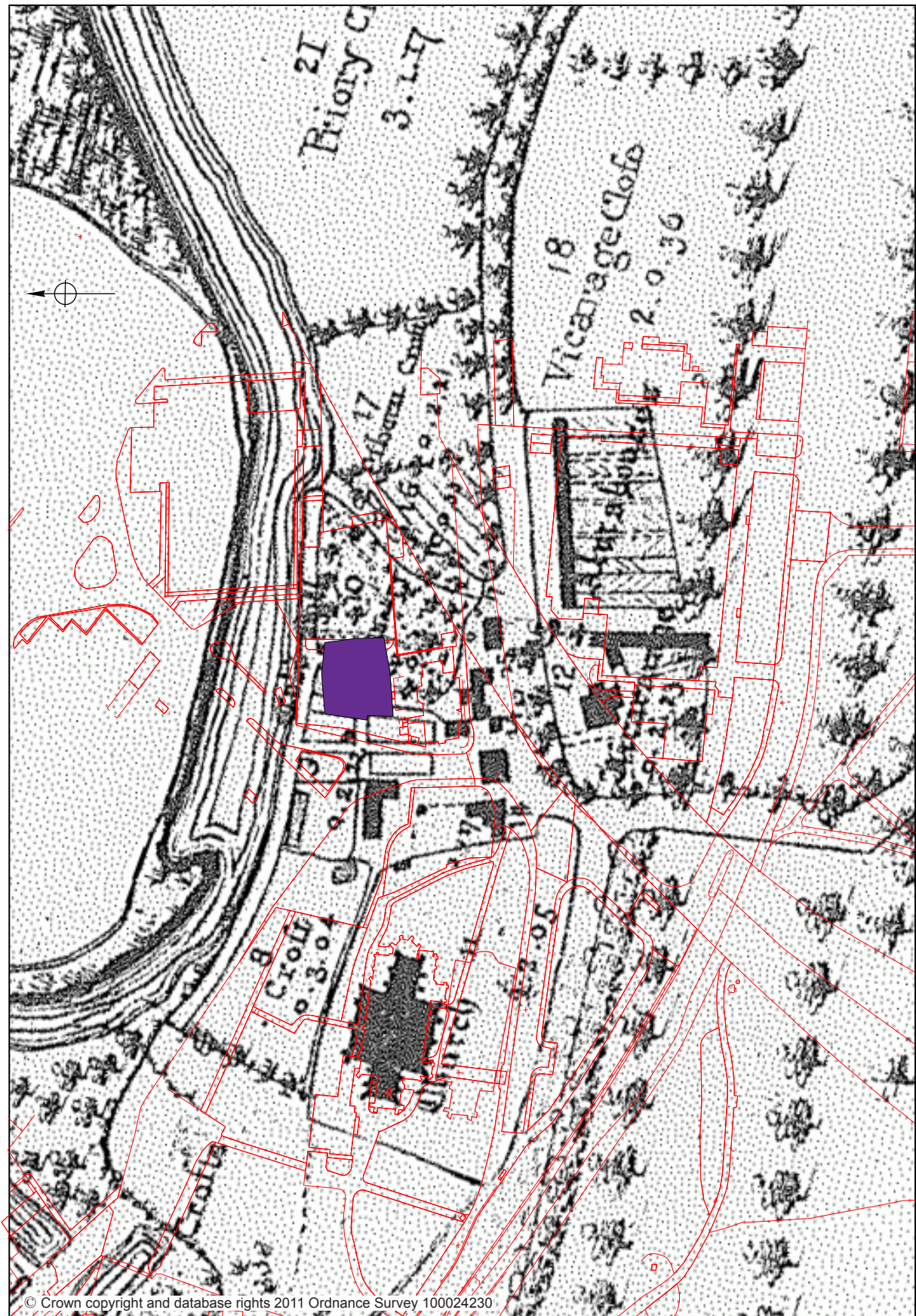
Plan of Excavation Area

Figure 2



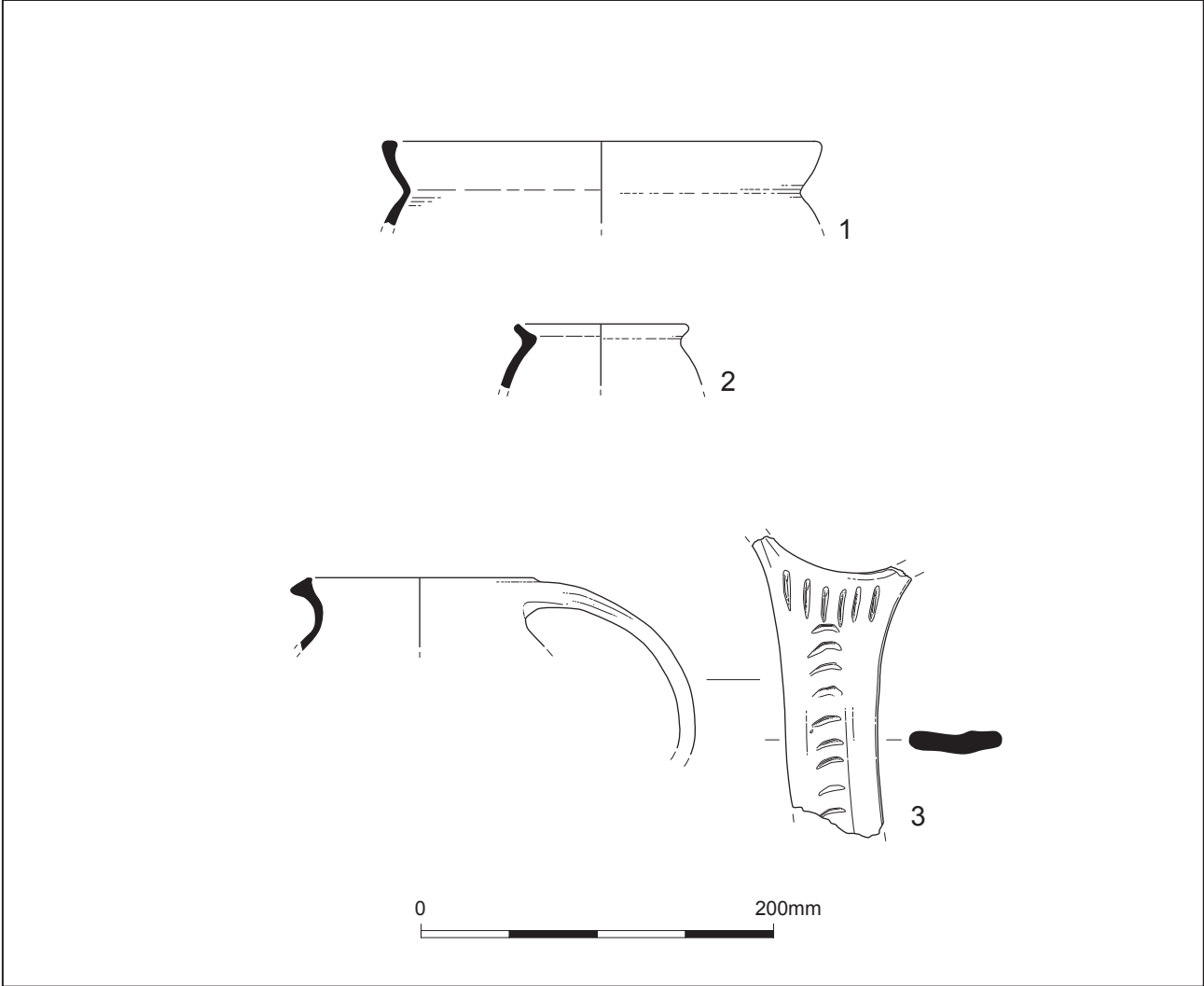
Detail of walls 155, 159 and 160

Figure 3



Detail from John Tomlinson's map of Aston Manor, 1758

Figure 4



Medieval pottery

Figure 5

Plates



Plate 1. The site prior to excavation facing west



Plate 2. The site following mechanical stripping facing west

Plate 3. Ditch 105 (truncated by 110) facing north



Plate 4. Cluster of postholes, 114,116,118,120,122,124 facing north



Plate 5 Pit 142 facing west.



Plate 6. Wall 155,159,160 facing north

Appendix 1 Technical information

The archive (site code: EBM634)

The archive consists of:

- 58 Context records AS1
- 5 Field progress reports AS2
- 2 Photographic records AS3
- 113 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 28 Scale drawings
- 1 Context number catalogues AS5
- 1 digital matrix sheet
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs

1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

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Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery
Chamberlain Square,
Birmingham, B3 3DH
Tel: +44 (0)121 303 1966
