

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION AT PLOT 7,
MASSHOUSE, BIRMINGHAM

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Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Archaeological evaluation at Plot 7, Masshouse, Birmingham

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Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Plot 7, Masshouse, Birmingham (NGR SP 075 872). It was undertaken on behalf of David McLean Developments Limited and CgMs Consulting who were acting as agents for the client. The client intended to develop the site. The project aimed to determine if any significant archaeological site was present and if so to indicate what its location, date and nature were.

The evaluation did not detect any significant archaeology in either of the evaluation trenches. Traces of a possible ditch was detected in the south section of Trench 3. The feature was not datable. The strata and features visible in the sections of both trenches were modern in date, possibly relating to the construction of the car park and the large-scale development of the area around it.

1. **Background**

1.1 **Reasons for the project**

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Plot 7, Masshouse, Birmingham (NGR SP 075 872), on behalf of David McLean Developments. The client intends to develop the area and has submitted a planning application to Birmingham City Council, who considered that a site of archaeological interest was affected.

1.2 **Project parameters**

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999)

The project also conforms to an archaeological written scheme of investigation (Cox 2003).

1.3 **Aims**

The aims of the evaluation were from the written scheme of investigation.

- To identify, within the constraints of the evaluation, the date, character, condition and depth of any surviving remains within the site
- To assess the degree of existing impacts to sub-surface horizons and to document the extent of archaeological survival of buried deposits

2. **Methods**

2.1 **Documentary search**

Prior to fieldwork commencing a written scheme of investigation was produced for the site in question. This detailed the archaeological background for the site. In addition to this previous reports for the area in question were referenced.

Cartographic sources

- Birmingham City Council Transportation Strategy 2003, Masshouse Infrastructure Changes, Plots 3 and 7 Lighting and Chartered Mains Services 1:500
- Ordnance Survey map, 1st Edition 1890. Extract from 1:10560 original

Documentary sources

- An archaeological written scheme of investigation (Cox 2003)
- Archaeological assessment of Masshouse, Birmingham (BUFAU 2001)
- Archaeological Evaluation at Plot 3, Masshouse, Birmingham (Patrick 2002)

2.2 **Fieldwork**

2.2.1 **Fieldwork strategy**

A detailed written scheme of investigation was prepared (Cox 2003). As a result of the documentary search, adjustments were made to the fieldwork strategy. The Trenches 4 and 5 were examined by geotechnical investigation several weeks before the fieldwork began and their archaeological investigation was ruled out on health and safety grounds, as the areas targeted for trenches were deemed to be contaminated. On starting the project, Trench 2 was abandoned as it was found to lie across the area of the former Queensway underpass.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 27th October and 30th October 2003.

Ultimately two trenches, amounting to about 140m² in area, were excavated over the site. The location of the trenches are indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a wheeled 360° excavator, employing a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision. The location of Trench 1 was changed slightly to avoid the remnant of the Queensway underpass. A breaker was employed on the machine to break the tarmac for Trench 3, after the designated area had been cut using a diamond-headed floor saw. The broken tarmac and underlying hardcore was removed using a toothed bucket, with the remaining material underneath these top layers being removed with a toothless bucket. All trenches were cleaned by hand and were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated using the excavated material. For Trench 3 the backfill was lightly compacted by machine and only up to the base of the current tarmac layer, in order to facilitate re-surfacing at a later date.

2.2.2 **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.

2.3 **Artefacts**

2.3.1 **Artefact recovery policy**

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 2). However, no artefacts were recovered during the course of the project.

2.4 **Environment**

2.4.1 **Sampling policy**

Due to the lack of significant archaeological deposits recorded during the evaluation, no environmental samples were taken.

2.5 **The methods in retrospect**

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

3. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The site is just over a hectare in size and located on the eastern side of the city centre (Figure 1 and 2). The site is underlain by sandy and gravelly Glacial drift which overlies Bromsgrove Sandstone of Triassic Age (BUFAU 2001).

The site was included in an archaeological desk-based assessment by the Birmingham Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU 2001). The assessment considered Sites and Monuments record information and cartographic evidence for the study of the Eastside area. There are no recorded SAM's, find spots or other evidence for activity on the site preceding the 16th century. The potential for finding deposits dating from the Roman, Saxon, early medieval or medieval periods was therefore very low (Cox 2003).

A 16th century survey records that the site lay within the Land of the Late Gild. A survey of 1731 records the land at the junction of Dale End, Moor Street, Park Street and Cole's Hill Street. The area was gradually built up with presumably mixed domestic and light industrial/commercial buildings between 1731, when it was recorded as a largely open cultivated area, and 1778. The site eventually became a car park by 1961 (Cox 2003).

The site was thought to have moderate potential for late medieval to post-medieval remains, with industrial and light commercial development being likely (Cox 2003).

4. **Description**

The archaeological contexts used for the fieldwork are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figures 2 and 3 with Plates 1 to 5 showing the site and the nature of the archaeology.

5. **Discussion**

5.1 **Phase 1 Natural deposits**

Natural deposits were observed in both of the trenches. This was an orangey red sand. The trenches showed this material had been redeposited on several occasions as a result of groundworks.

5.2 **Phase 2 Modern period**

Both trenches displayed a lot of activity relating to the modern period. Trench 1 was composed of dumped layers of sand and dark grey silty material. The lowest layer present in the section (one of the stratigraphically earliest) was context 121, which lay directly on top of the undisturbed natural. This was a dark grey silty deposit, which contained lumps of modern concrete. These dumped layers of sand and stone were occasionally cut through by services, most of them ceramic pipes laid on top of a concrete bed. The earliest context in Trench 1 appears to be the cut for a culvert of an indeterminate date. Trench 3 had a potential feature in the form of a concave-sided gravelly feature in the south section. No artefactual material was recovered from this though, so it could not be dated. It cut through the natural sand and was sealed by similar dark grey silt and red sand layers as were visible in Trench 1. A large brick service was present at the east end of the trench. This was probably the abandoned sewer visible on Figure 2. It can be assumed that the variety of layers in the trenches relate to the period of groundworks undertaken with the construction of the Queensway roadway, which runs through the site, the adjacent National Westminster Bank building and the levelling required for the car park in 1961.

6. Significance

The site of Plot 7, Masshouse has been subject to intensive alterations in the period since the Second World War, with significant landscape alterations occurring, principally during the construction of the Queensway Circus roadway and levelling for the car park. It seems that this landscaping has possibly truncated much of the post-medieval industrial archaeology. Only two evaluation trenches could be excavated on the site, with these being in a couple of the small pockets of land that archaeology might have survived the 20th century developments. It is possible that remnants of former occupation of Plot 7 survive in small pockets in the north-eastern corner of the site, but unfortunately this area was deemed to be contaminated.

7. Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on behalf of David McLean Developments Limited at Plot 7, Masshouse, Birmingham (NGR SP 075 872). The site was thought to have the potential for industrial archaeology from the post-medieval period, but unfortunately no such significant archaeology was found. The two trenches both had a number of layers probably dating to the late 20th century, whilst a couple of services certainly pre-dated that period. A possible ditch or pit was located in the south section of trench 3, but unfortunately no dating evidence was retrieved from it, nor any conclusive proof of exactly what form it took. However, it was sealed by the late 20th century layering. No evidence of any structure or industrial process from the post-medieval, or any earlier period, was found.

8. The archive

The archive consists of:

2	Fieldwork progress records AS2
1	Photographic record AS3
13	Digital colour images
4	Abbreviated context records AS40
1	Scale drawings
5	Trench record sheets

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Birmingham City Museum

9. Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, David McLean Developments Limited, Chris Cox and Dr Mike Hodder.

10. **Personnel**

The fieldwork was led by James Goad and Chris Patrick. The report preparation was undertaken by James Goad. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Hal Dalwood. Fieldwork was undertaken by Alvaro Mora-Ottomano and Andrew Brown, with illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

11. **Bibliography**

BUFAU 2001 *An archaeological desk-based assessment of Birmingham Eastside*. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit report

CAS, 1995 (as amended) *Manual of Service practice: fieldwork recording manual*, County Archaeological Service, Hereford and Worcester County Council, report, **399**

Cox, C, 2003 *Archaeological written scheme of investigation of Plot 7, Masshouse, Birmingham*, CgMs Consulting, August 2003

IFA, 1999 *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation*, Institute of Field Archaeologists

Patrick, C, 2002 *Archaeological evaluation at Plot 3, Masshouse, Birmingham*, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service 14th August 2002

12. **Abbreviations**

BSMR Numbers prefixed with “BSMR” are the primary reference numbers used by the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record

SAM Scheduled Ancient Monument

SMR Sites and Monuments Record.

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Table 1**Trench 1**

Maximum dimensions: Length: 25m Width: 4m Depth: 0-1.70m

Orientation: North-south

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Trench cut		
101	Tarmac	Block tarmac	0-0.09m
102	Levelling layer	Compacted hardcore	0.09-0.29m
103	Levelling layer?	Compacted mid brown sand with frequent sub-rounded pebbles	0.15-0.35m
104	Floor	Concrete floor/surface located around north-west area of trench	0.20-0.35m
105	Layer	Firm mid reddish brown sand	0.30-0.40m
106	Fill of 109-backfill of construction cut	Firm light greyish brown sand with frequent small pebbles	0-1.10m
107	Ceramic pipe, part of cut 109	Orientated south east to north west	1.05-1.20m
108	Basal concrete deposit of pipe cut	Concrete base for ceramic pipe	1.20-1.70m
109	Pipe trench	Vertical sides with a concave base. Orientated south east to north west	0-1.20m
110	Layer	Hard mid greyish brown silty sand with moderate medium sub-rounded stones	0.30-0.40m
111	Layer	Hardcore	0.45-0.60m
112	Layer	Firm mid reddish brown sand with occasional medium rounded stones	0.60-0.80m
113	Layer	Firm dark brownish grey sand with occasional charcoal fragments mainly at the base with a few medium round stones	0.75-0.90m
114	Upper fill of trench 117	Soft light orangey brown sand with occasional small gravels	0.90-1.25m

115	Brick culvert, within cut 117	Apsidally-shaped brick culvert	1.25-1.60m
116	Bottom fill of 117, backfill around brick culvert 115	Firm mid orangey brown sand	1.30-1.60m
117	Culvert trench	A south east to north west trench filled by 114, 116 and 115	0.90-1.60m
118	Layer	Loose dark greyish black sandy layer	0.30-0.50m
119	Layer	Soft to firm orange sand. Occasional small to medium sized stones. Occasional large stones	0.70-1.40m
120	Layer	Firm mid greenish brown sandy silt. Moderate medium to large stone inclusions.	0.93-1.28m
121	Layer	Friable dark grey sandy silt. Moderate small stone inclusions. Occasional large pieces of concrete present at base of layer	1.23-1.80m
122	Natural	Soft orangey red sand. Compaction and colouring variable with occasional rounded medium stones	1.80m-

Table 2**Trench 3**

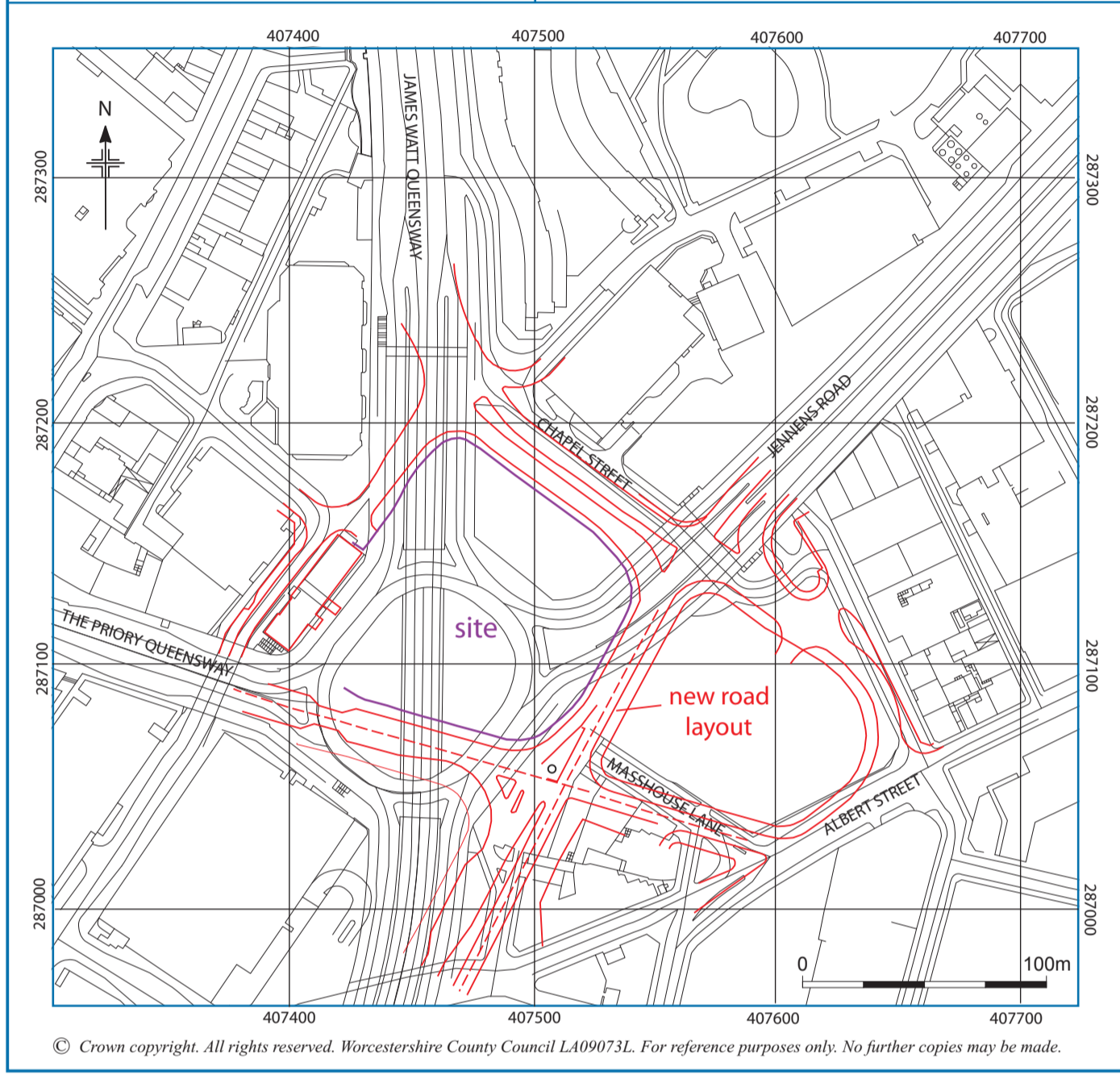
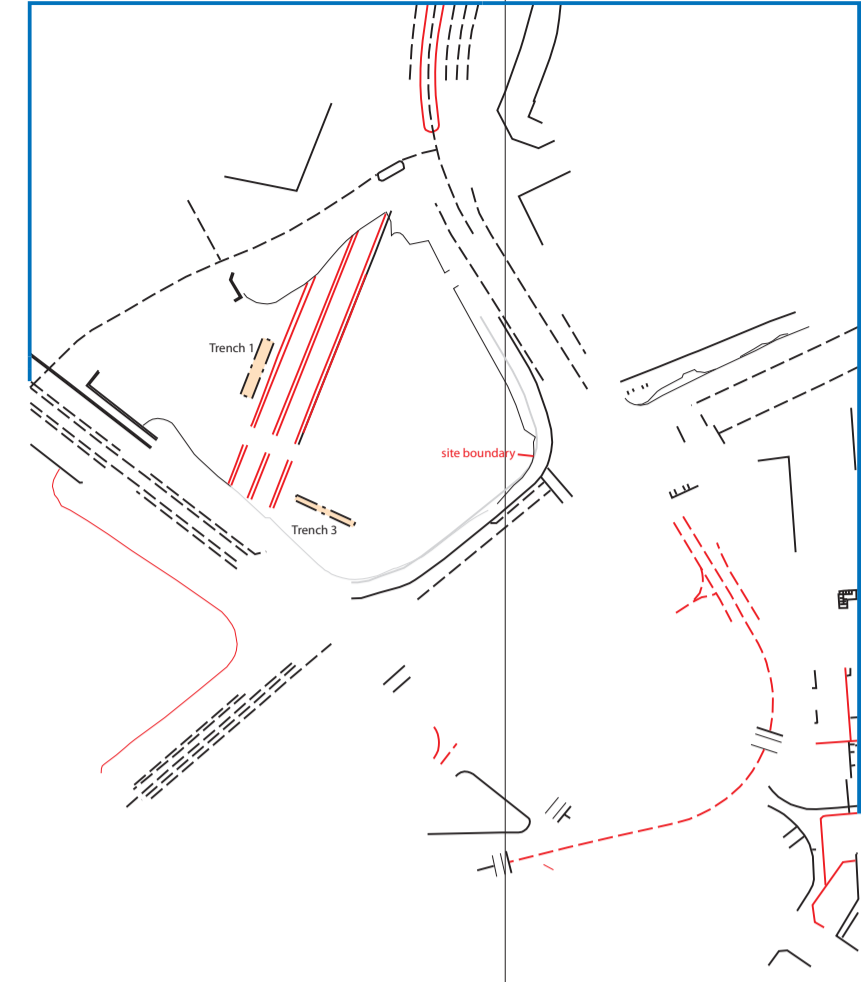
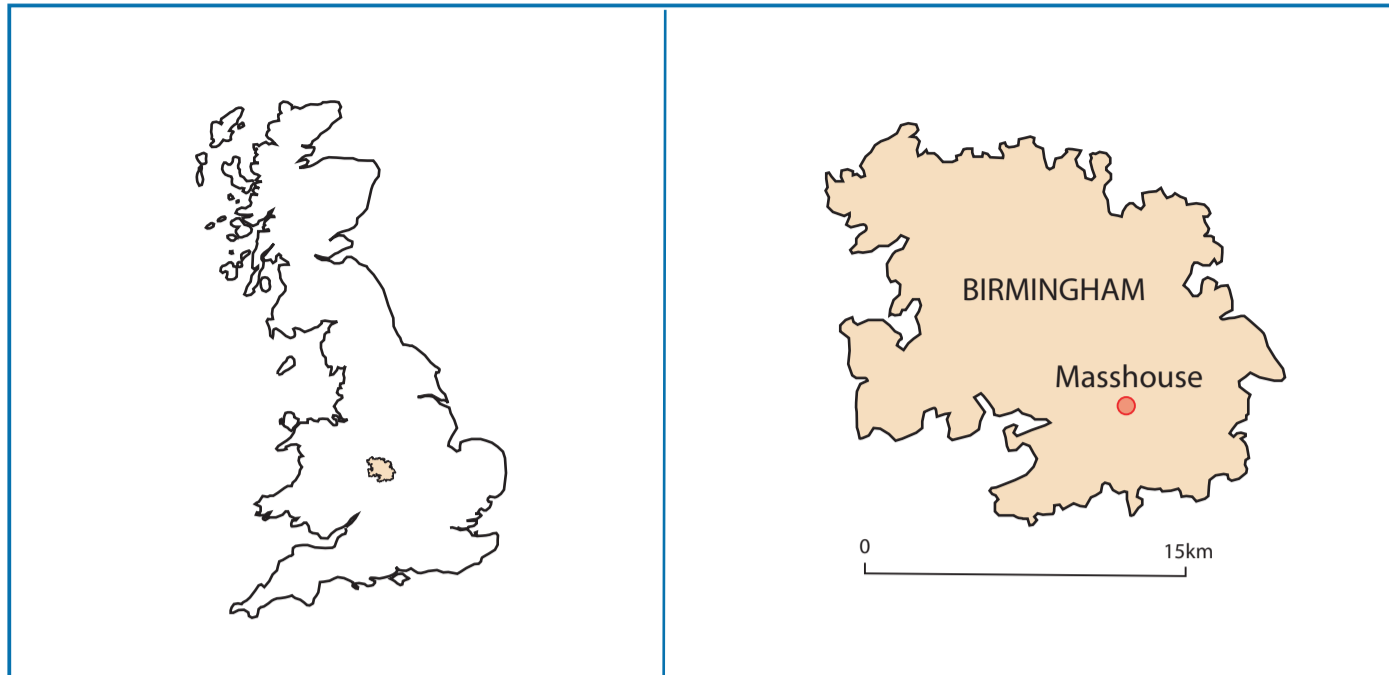
Maximum dimensions: Length: 22.80m Width: 1.80m Depth: 1.30m

Orientation: East-west

Main deposit descriptions

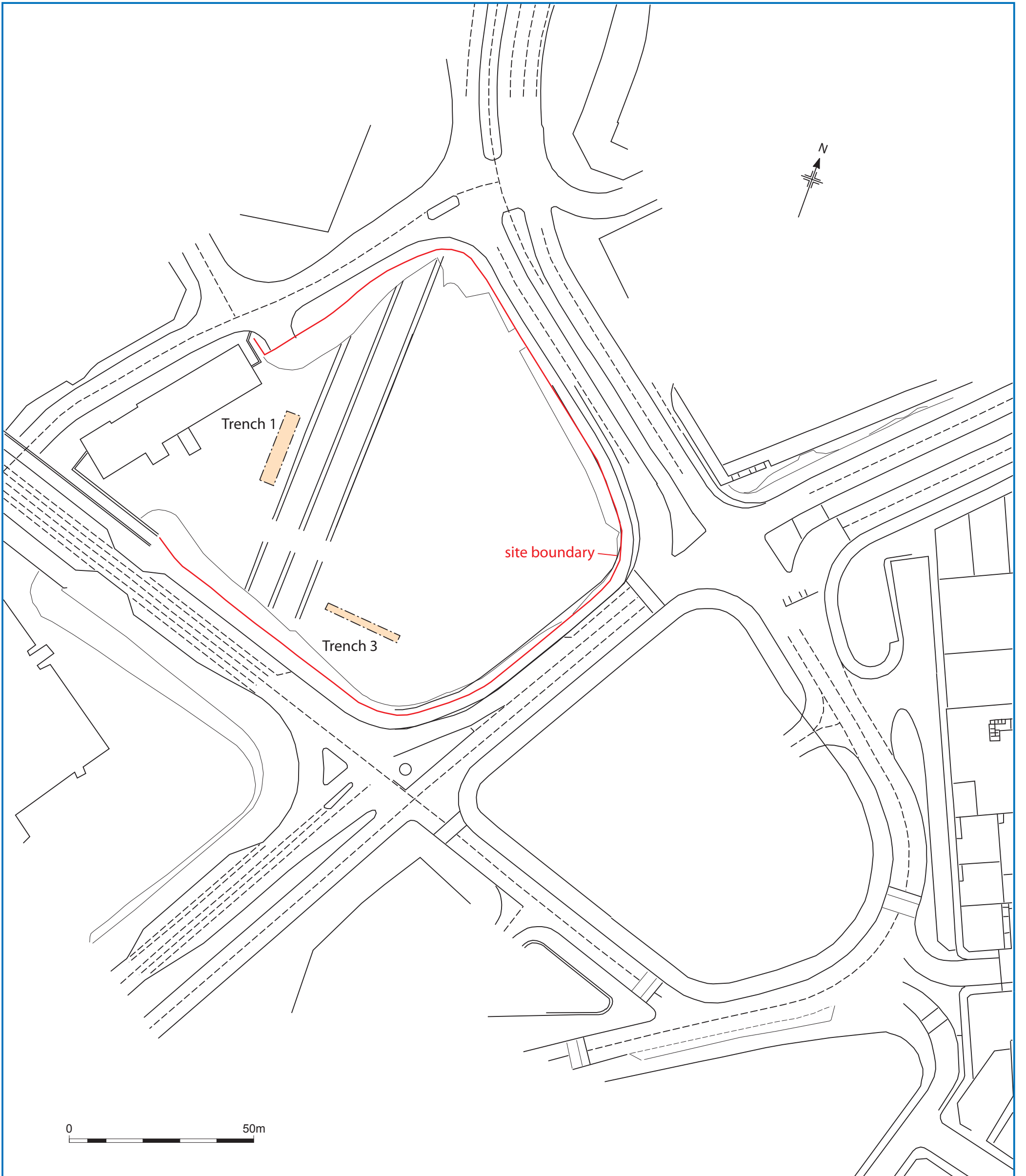
Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s.) – top and bottom of deposits
301	Car park surface	Tarmac	0-0.07m
302	Levelling layer below tarmac surface	Hardcore	0.07-0.20m
303	Make-up layer	Loose mid brownish red sand with occasional sub rounded stones	0.20-0.65m
304	Dumped layer	Soft dark grey sandy silt with moderate concrete fragments	0.65-0.75m

305	Possible ditch/pit fill of 306	Firm mid greyish brown sand with moderate medium-sized rounded stones	0.90-1.30m
306	Ditch or pit cut, filled by	Shallow concave sides, not visible or detectable in north section due to trench collapse	0.90-1.30m
307	Natural	Natural orangey sand	



Location of the site.

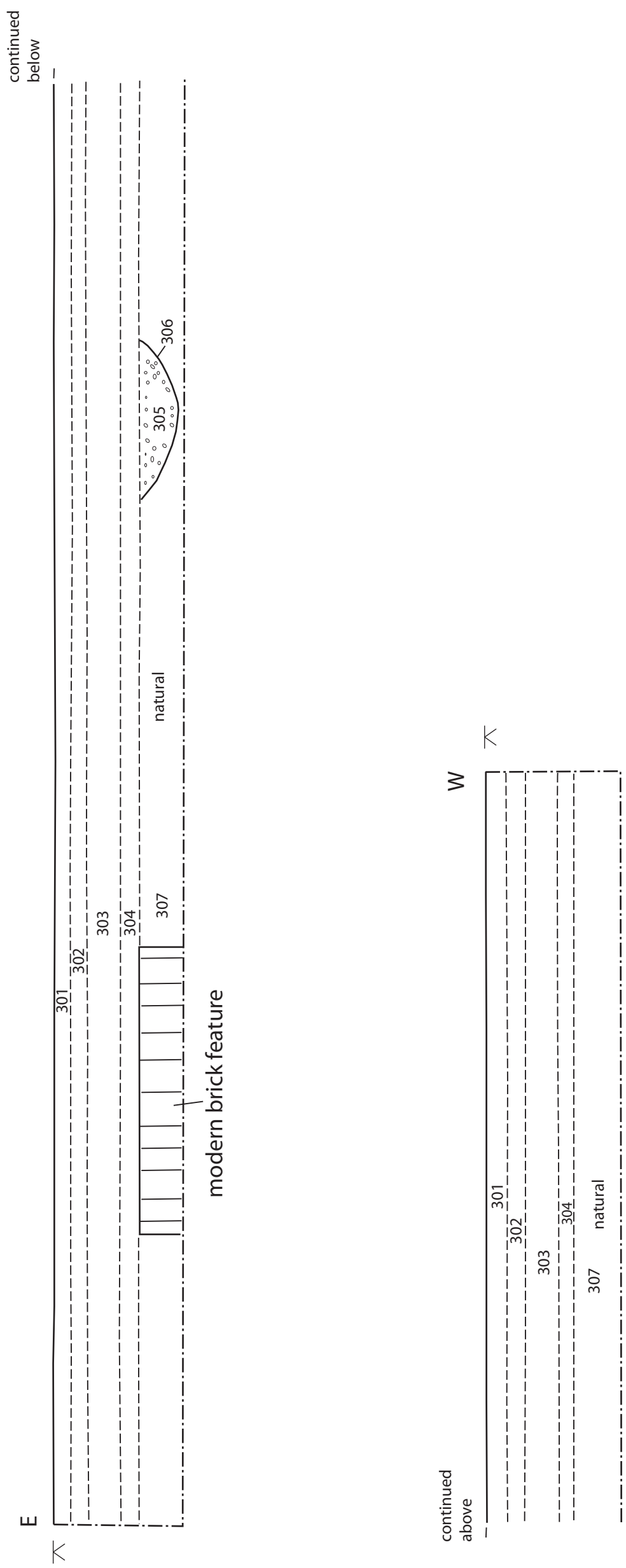
Figure 1



Trench location plan (based on Birmingham City Council Transportation Strategy: Masshouse Infrastructure Changes plan)

Figure 2

TRENCH 3: NORTH-FACING SECTION



Trench 3: North-facing section.



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Extract from 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, 1890.

Figure 4



Plate 1: Trench 1, looking south down trench



Plate 2: Trench 1, East section, showing modern dumped layers



Plate 3: Trench 3. looking east down the trench



Plate 4: Trench 3, with possible ditch or pit cut visible in the lower portion of the south section



Plate 5: Trench 3, general view of trench, looking west