

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
AT
76, WELLHEAD LANE
PERRY BARR
BIRMINGHAM



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Worcestershire Archaeology
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An archaeological evaluation at 76, Wellhead Lane, Perry Barr, Birmingham

Andrew Walsh

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 76, Wellhead Lane, Perry Barr, Birmingham (NGR SP 4070 2908). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, on behalf of their client who intends to construct a supermarket for which a planning application has been submitted.

The site was located next to Wellhead Lane, which is believed to be on the line of a section of Ryknild Street, a Roman Road which ran between Bourton on the Water and Derby. Four evaluation trenches were excavated across the site but it was not possible to locate any immediately next to Wellhead Lane due to the presence of a small Gas Valve Compound and a row of mature trees.

Natural deposits were exposed in three of the trenches. No archaeological features or deposits were identified indicating that there was no roadside settlement or occupation within the proposed site. However, it is possible that remains associated with the Roman road such as roadside ditches and/or a road surface, may survive in the area between the evaluation trenches and Wellhead Lane.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 76, Wellhead Lane, Perry Barr, Birmingham (NGR SP 4070 2908). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, on behalf of their client who intends to construct a supermarket for which a planning application has been submitted to Birmingham City Council (reference 2011/07426/PA). The proposed development site was considered to include heritage assets and potential heritage assets the significance of which may be affected by the application. These assets relate to the Roman road, known as Ryknild Street.

A brief for an archaeological excavation was issued by Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist for the Development Directorate of Birmingham City Council (BCC 2014) but following discussion with CgMs Consulting it was agreed to excavate four evaluation trenches in areas which were thought to have been less disturbed during demolition and remediation works of former factory buildings which stood in this area. A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2014). The project conforms to this document and to *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008).

2 Aims

The aims of this evaluation are:

- to describe and assess the significance of the heritage asset with archaeological interest;
- to establish the nature, importance and extent of the archaeological site;
- to assess the impact of the application on the archaeological site.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The fieldwork was led by Andrew Walsh (BSc MSc FSA Scot AlfA) who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2013 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004. He was assisted in the field by Graham Arnold (BA MSc) and Mike Nicholson (BSc). The report preparation was led by Andrew Walsh and the project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA MSc). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt and Andrew Walsh.

3.2 Fieldwork strategy

A Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2014). Three trenches were originally proposed for excavation amounting to c.150m² in area over the site area of 0.55ha, representing a sample of c 3%. The trenches targeted areas away from former industrial buildings which had been demolished prior to the archaeological evaluation. The remediation works associated with the demolition are believed to have penetrated up to 3.5m below the present ground level. The Roman road was believed to be orientated along the eastern edge of the development site, although due to the presence of a small Gas Valve Compound and row of mature trees it was not possible to evaluate this area during current phase of works.

Removal of tarmac in Trench 2 revealed reinforced concrete beams so a fourth trench was excavated away from the beams. The position of Trenches 1 and 3 were also adjusted due to the possible presence of services. In total around 230m² was exposed. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° tracked mechanical excavator, employing a toothless bucket and under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their

nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material. Fieldwork was undertaken between 24 March and 27 March 2014.

3.3 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.

3.4 Artefact methodology

3.4.1 Recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard WA practice (2012; appendix 2). In the event, no finds were recovered.

3.5 Environmental archaeology methodology

3.5.1 Sampling policy

The sampling policy conformed to standard WA practice (2012). In the event no deposits were revealed which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

3.6 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 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The proposed development site occupies a rectangular-shaped plot of land and to ease description it is assumed the site is orientated east-west. The site is bounded by Wellhead Lane to the east, Aston Lane to the south, and industrial properties to the west and north. The site is flat, lying at a height of 99.5m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The underlying geology of the site is mapped as interbedded sandstone and conglomerate of the Kidderminster Formation, overlain by superficial deposits of sand and gravel (BGS 2014).

The proposed site lies immediately west of the predicted line of Ryknild Street, a Roman road running between Bourton on the Water in Gloucestershire and Derby. Its course through the Birmingham is not certain, although the route is thought to survive along the course of Wellhead Lane and Stoneleigh Road. A recent archaeological evaluation and excavation on the corner of Aston Lane and Stoneleigh Road, approximately 40m to the south-east of the proposed site, identified an undated ditch which was interpreted as the eastern roadside ditch, and a cobbled surface which may have been part of the road (Burrows 2010). Archaeological excavation to the north-east of the site also revealed a ditch likely to be the eastern roadside ditch of the Roman road (Burrows 2008).

Terraced housing, with gardens to the rear, was recorded on the site along Aston Lane on the 1st edition OS map (OS 1884-90). The houses were also recorded on the OS maps of 1904, 1916, and 1938-45, but were demolished by the OS map of 1953-62 when industrial buildings associated with the works to the north of the site are recorded on the site.

4.2 Current land-use

The site was formerly a factory, whose buildings have been demolished. Most hardstanding has been broken up although some areas of tarmac and concrete survive especially to the east and north of the site.

5 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The underlying natural deposit in Trenches 1, 3 and 4 was a yellowy brown, slightly clayey sand with frequent cobbles and pebbles (Plates 1-3). It was typically exposed at 0.4m-0.5m below the present ground surface. Natural deposits were not identified in Trench 2 where removal of tarmac revealed at least three reinforced concrete footing slabs, and no further excavation was undertaken (Plate 4).

A number of tree throws (107, 109, 111 and 408) and patches of variation in the natural substrate were also identified in Trenches 1 and 4.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Modern deposits

Sealing the natural substrate in Trench 1 and 4 was a dark brown loamy soil (103 and 403). This was interpreted as a former agricultural or garden topsoil (possibly associated with the terraced housing located on the site). It was cut by a number of modern features which included service trenches, discrete features, brick walls 405 and 411 (see below) as well as the remediation works. These features were probably associated with the former industrial buildings which occupied the site. No evidence of the terraced housing was identified during the evaluation and topsoil 103/403 was not identified in Trenches 2 or 3.

Two brick walls (405 and 411) were identified in Trench 4 (Plate 3). Orientated east to west for 7.5m along to northern section of the trench was wall 405. To the west of wall 405 was wall 411 which was orientated approximately north to south. This wall formed the eastern side of a backfilled cellar (406). The size of the cellar was not established during the evaluation. The cellar was located approximately 21m west of Wellhead Lane.

The edge of the remediation work (112) was established in Trench 1 approximately 28m west of Wellhead Lane. There was no evidence of any remediation works in Trenches 2, 3, or 4.

6 Synthesis

Well preserved natural deposits were identified in Trenches 1, 3 and 4, typically approximately 0.5m below the present ground surface, and sealed by a buried topsoil. However no archaeological features were identified cutting the natural substrate within the trenches, indicating that there was no significant roadside settlement or occupation within the proposed development site. The archaeological works undertaken in 2010 to south-east of the proposed site also failed to identify any evidence of roadside features, and it is probable that this section of Ryknild Street was running through an agricultural or unoccupied landscape.

In the area between Trenches 1 and 4, and Wellhead Lane it is possible that the roadside ditch(es) and/or road surface may survive. Due to the presence of a small Gas Valve Compound and row of mature trees it was not possible to evaluate this area during current phase of works, but any future archaeological work should focus on the area between the evaluation trenches and Wellhead Lane if this part of the site is likely to be impacted upon by the proposed development.

7 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 through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

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8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project; James Gidman of CgMs Consulting for commissioning the work, Josh Penrose of St Francis Group for providing access to the site, and Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council for monitoring the work.

9 Bibliography

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OS 1890 1st edition, scale 25":1 mile

OS 1904 scale 25":1 mile

OS 1916 scale 25":1 mile

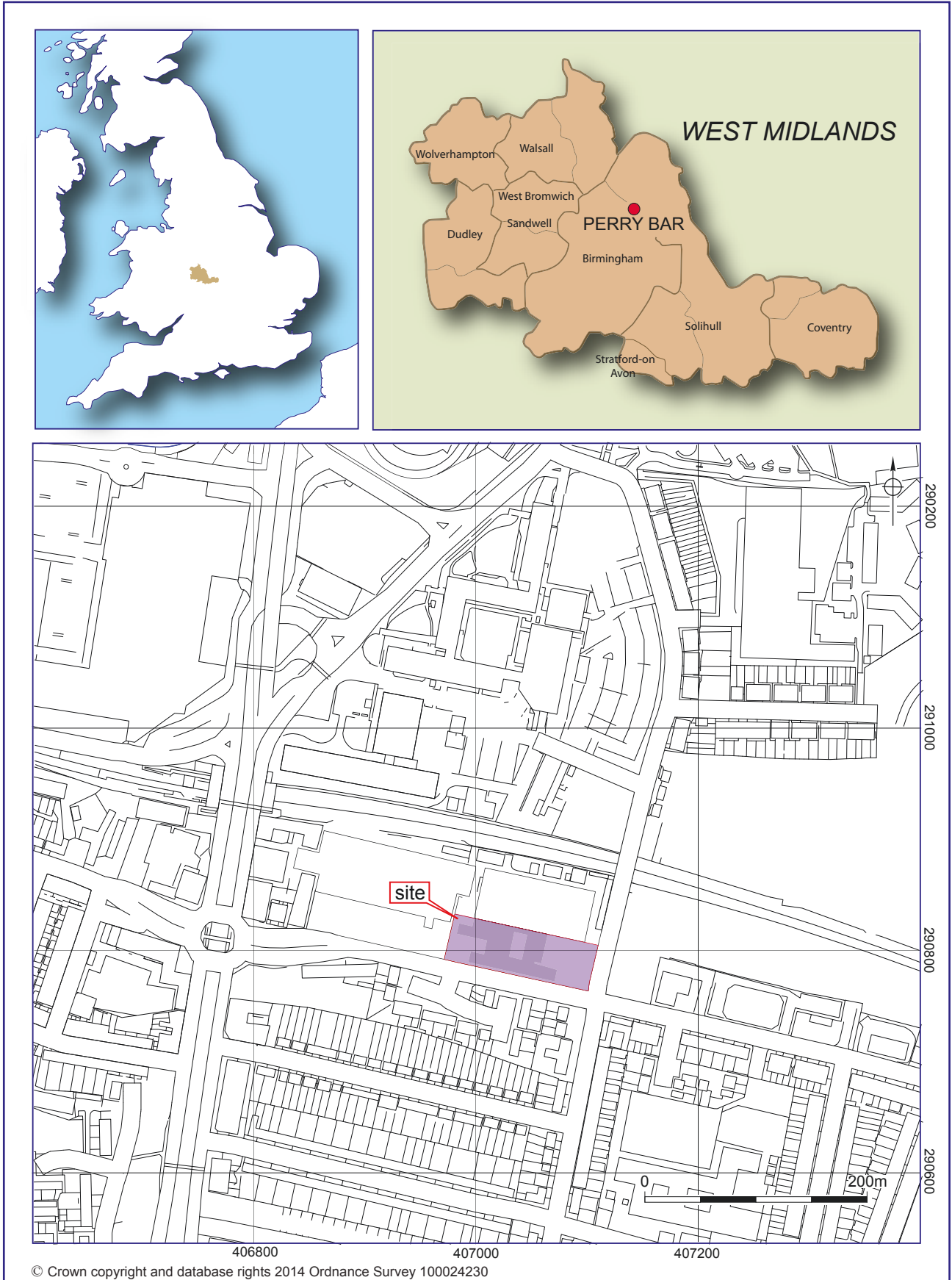
OS 1938-45 scale 25":1 mile

OS 1953-62 scale 25":1 mile

WA 2012 *Manual of service practice, recording manual*, Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, report **1842**

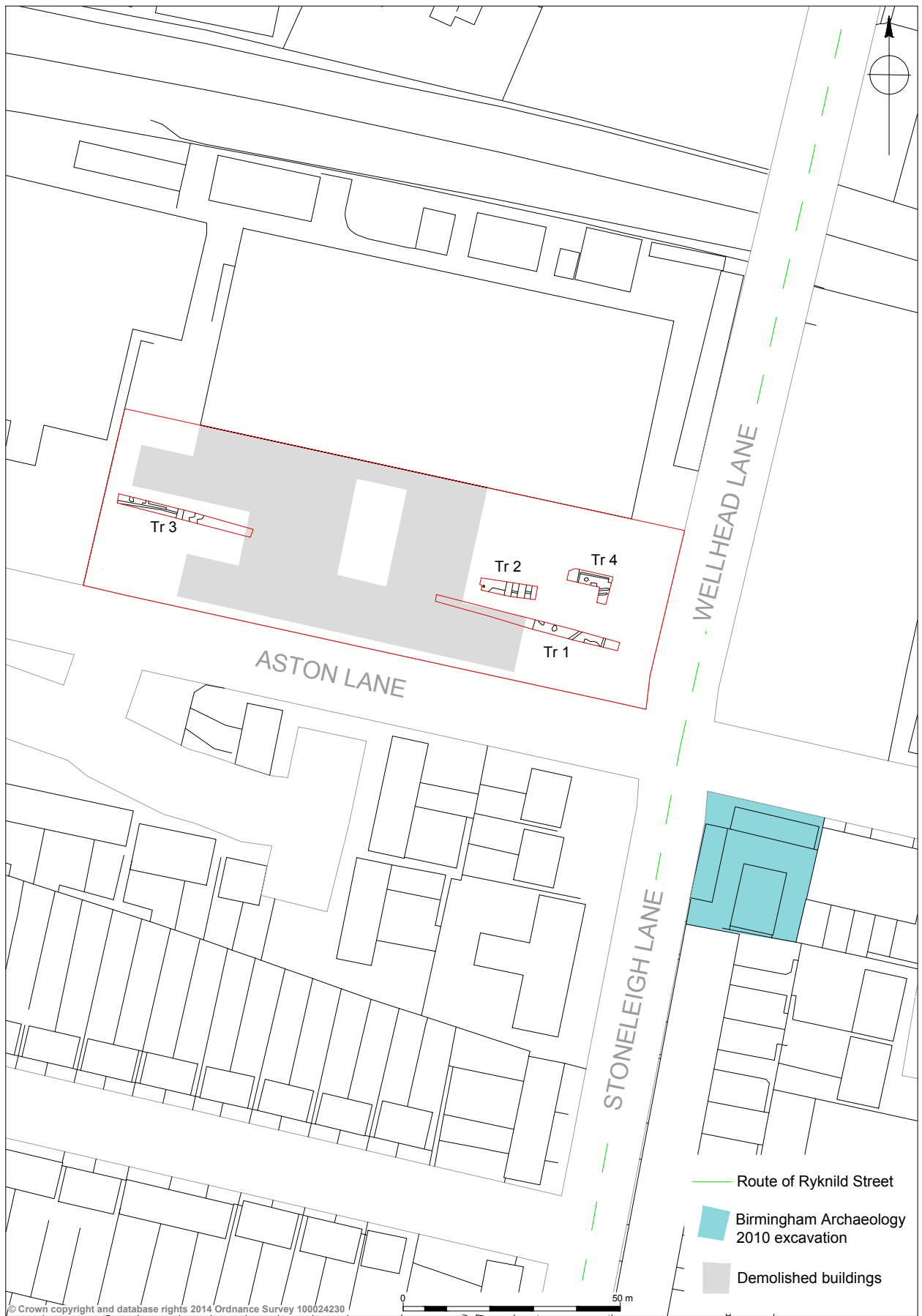
WA 2014 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation at 76 Wellhead Lane, Perry Barr, Birmingham*, Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, document dated 20 March 2014, P4307

Figures



Location of the site

Figure 1



Trench location plan

Figure 2



Trench plans

Figure 3

Plates



Plate 1. Trench 1. Photo looking west



Plate 2. Trench 3. Photo looking west



Plate 3. Trench 4 showing the variation in the natural substrate, wall 105 to the right and cellar backfill 406 in the distance. Photo looking west



Plate 4. Trench 2 showing the reinforced concrete slabs below the tarmac/rubble ground surface. Photo looking west



Plate 5. The edge of the remediation groundworks was visible in Trench 1. Photo looking south-east

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 43.5m Width: 2.1m Depth: 0.5m

Orientation: East-west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description
100	Layer	Tarmac and CBM rubble surface
101	Layer	Hardcore, bedding for 100
102	Layer	Hardcore
103	Layer	Dark brown loam, former garden or agricultural topsoil?
104	Layer	Yellowy brown, slightly clayey sand with frequent cobbles and pebbles. Natural
105	Layer	Fill of remediated ground 112
106	Layer	Fill of tree throw 107
107	Cut	Cut of tree throw
108	Layer	Fill of tree throw 109
109	Cut	Cut of tree throw
110	Layer	Fill of tree throw 111
111	Cut	Cut of tree throw
112	Cut	Cut of remediation works

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 13.5m Width: 3.0m Depth: 0.1m

Orientation: East-west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description
200	Wall	Concrete foundations
201	Wall	Brick internal walls
202	Surface	Brick and concrete floor surface

Context	Classification	Description
203	Layer	Modern CBM and clinker rubble infill
204	Layer	Tarmac ground surface

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 31.8m Width: 2.1m Depth: 0.5m

Orientation: East-west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description
300	Layer	Concrete ground surface
301	Layer	Black tarmac and clinker, bedding for 300
302	Layer	Hardcore, bedding below 301
303	Layer	Layer of CBM and rubble
304	Layer	Yellowy brown, slightly clayey sand with frequent cobbles and pebbles. Natural

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 17.5m Width: 3.0m Depth: 0.6m

Orientation: North-south/east-west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description
400	Layer	Tarmac and CBM rubble surface
401	Layer	Hardcore, bedding for 100
402	Layer	Hardcore
403	Layer	Dark brown loam, former garden or agricultural topsoil?
404	Wall	Concrete footing for wall 405
405	Wall	East-west aligned wall
406	Layer	Backfill of cellar

Context	Classification	Description
407	Cut	Yellowy brown, slightly clayey sand with frequent cobbles and pebbles. Natural
408	Layer	Tree throw
409	Layer	Natural leaching/variation
410	Layer	Natural leaching/variation
411	Wall	Cellar wall

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (site code: P4307)

The archive consists of:

- 3 Context records AS1
- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 25 Digital photographs
- 4 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery
Chamberlain Square
Birmingham
B3 3DH
Tel. Birmingham (0121) 303 2834
Fax Birmingham (0121) 303 1394
