

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION AT PLOT 3
MASSHOUSE, BIRMINGHAM,
WEST MIDLANDS

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Illustrated by Simon Griffin and Carolyn Hunt

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Archaeological Evaluation at Plot 3, Masshouse, Birmingham, West Midlands

Chris Patrick

Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting at Plot 3, Masshouse, Birmingham City Centre, West Midlands (NGR SP 0760 8710). CgMs Consulting were acting on behalf of David McLean Developments Ltd who have submitted an outline planning application for the site. The evaluation was undertaken on the site of St. Bartholomew's Chapel and burial ground to test for the presence of surviving human remains and for the foundations of the chapel. St. Bartholomew's Chapel and its burial ground were built in the mid-18th century on the eastern edge of the city. The burial ground was closed to burials in the mid-19th century and became a park while the chapel itself continued in use until its closure in 1937. The chapel was demolished in 1943 and by the 1960s the site had become a Birmingham City Council car park. Anecdotal evidence of this time suggested that the burial ground was cleared of human remains but this was not known for certain.

Four trial trenches were excavated across the car park on the 5th and 6th August 2002. The trenching showed that the site of St. Bartholomew's Chapel and its burial ground has been the subject of extensive ground disturbance since its closure and it would appear that a very thorough graveyard clearance had taken place sometime in the early 1960s. The ground seems to have been disturbed to a depth of approximately 3m across the entire area. The only evidence for the chapel was rubble and a collapsed wall at the northwestern edge of the site.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Plot 3, Masshouse, Birmingham city centre (NGR SP 0760 8710, Fig. 1), on behalf of CgMs Consulting. CgMs Consulting are acting on behalf of David McLean Developments Limited who intend to develop the land and have submitted an outline planning application to Birmingham City Council, who consider that a site of archaeological interest may be affected.

1.2 Project parameters

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

The project also conforms to a written scheme of investigation prepared by CgMs Consulting and approved by the Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council (CgMs 2002).

1.3 Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to locate archaeological deposits and determine, if present, their extent, state of preservation, date, type, vulnerability and documentation. The purpose of this was to establish their significance, since this would make it possible to recommend appropriate mitigation, which may then be integrated with the proposed development programme.

More specifically the following aims have been identified.

- To evaluate by trial trenching the remains of St. Bartholomew's Chapel
- To evaluate by trial trenching a representative sample of the former burial ground to test for human remains

2. Site location and geology

Plot 3, Masshouse, is located on the eastern side of the city and comprises of an area of land measuring 0.713 hectares which slopes from northwest to southeast and is currently used as a Birmingham City Council car park. The car park is tarmaced and bounded by Bartholomew Row, Albert Street, Masshouse Lane and a Birse Construction compound.

The site is underlain by sandy and gravelly glacial drift, which overlies Bromgrove sandstone of Triassic Age.

3. Historical background

The site was included in an archaeological desk-based assessment by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU 2001a). The assessment considered the Sites and Monuments Record and cartographic evidence for the study area and its vicinity.

The assessment showed that the earliest recorded activity in the area was the construction of Duddeston Road in the 16th century, which was later to become Albert Street. The eastward

spread of the city in 17th and 18th centuries resulted in the development of the area including the construction of St. Bartholomew's Chapel and the laying out of its burial ground in the mid-18th century. The burial ground was closed to internments in the mid-19th century and the area was then used as a recreational area (Fig. 2). The Chapel remained in use until 1937 and was demolished in 1943. The whole site was converted into a car park in 1961 and anecdotal evidence suggests that the burial ground was cleared at this time. An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during road construction along the St. Bartholomew's Lane side of the site seemed to confirm this (BUFAU 2001b) and only disarticulated bone and coffin furniture was recovered. It is not known how representative these findings are for the whole site, the extent of the burial ground clearance is unknown and further archaeological investigation has been required.

4. Methods

4.1 Fieldwork

4.1.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification was prepared by CgMs Consulting (CgMs 2002). Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th and 6th August 2002.

Four trenches, amounting to just over 144m² in area, were excavated over the site area of 0.713ha. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 3.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° wheeled excavator, employing a toothless bucket and under archaeological supervision. Any 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 Service practice (CAS 1995). On completion of excavation, trenches were to be reinstated by replacing the excavated material. In some instances because of the depth of the trenches and the loose nature of the removed material, the trenches were excavated in short lengths, which were then promptly back-filled after recording to prevent collapse of the sections.

Due to the site being a former burial ground a licence for the removal of human remains was obtained from the Home Office prior the start of the evaluation (Licence number A4084). All excavations were screened from public view throughout using Heras fencing covered with plastic sheeting to comply with the conditions of the licence.

All trenches and archaeological features were located with a Leica TC605 total station and photographs were taken with a digital camera.

4.2 Artefacts

4.2.1 Artefact recovery policy

Any human remains were to be left *in situ*, covered and protected. Disarticulated remains were gathered for quantification and identification and reburied at the base of the trench and no human remains were removed from site. Gravestones, fragments of masonry from the Chapel and other finds were photographed and reburied.

4.3 The methods in retrospect

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

5. Description

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

5.1 Phase 1 Natural deposits

Natural deposits were observed in all four trenches and consisted of Bromsgrove Sandstone overlain in places by drift gravels and sands.

Phase 2 Post-medieval

The remains of St. Bartholomew's Chapel were located in Trench 1 at the northwest edge of the site close to the Birse Construction compound (Fig 3). The trench was excavated to a depth of 2.4m, through made ground consisting of orange-brown silty sands with a large quantity of loose demolition debris including brickwork, stone and tile. The large quantity of masonry was interpreted as the remains of the chapel and showed that it had been the subject of an extremely thorough demolition job. A large piece of redbrick wall was found lying flat at the northern end of the trench 1.5m beneath the ground surface, measuring approximately 4m long by at least 2m wide and 0.5m thick (Plate 1). The wall appeared to have been pushed into a void in the ground and it may be that the chapel was demolished into an underlying crypt. The wall may have just been re-deposited during later earth moving activity in the area. A small quantity of disarticulated human bone was found close to the northern end of the trench around the collapsed wall. An attempt was made to see what was under the wall but it was not possible due to the size of the masonry and the narrowness of the trench. Several pieces of carved stone thought to be from the chapel were found amongst the rubble (Plate 2).

Trenches 2 and 3 were both excavated to a depth of 3m, through a deposit of mixed silty sand to the natural sandstone beneath (Fig 3). The section of the trenches showed banding of material with clear tip lines (Plates 3 and 4). The material all seemed to have been re-deposited from elsewhere and was very clean with no rubble inclusions other than a few fragments of salt-glazed drain-pipe and tar near the base of Trench 2 and several pieces of corrugated asbestos from Trench 3. Very little human bone was recovered, 23 fragments from Trench 3 and only two fragments from Trench 2. A large slab of sandstone was visible in the northeast facing section of Trench 3 was possibly the remains of a grave monument.

The boundary of the graveyard was found in the southwestern end of Trench 4, 0.48m below the car park surface and consisted of the foundation of the former boundary wall and the pavement and road surface of the earlier alignment of Masshouse Lane (Plate 5). The road surface was tarmac and was abutted to the east by a pavement constructed of granite kerb stones and blue bricks. Redundant electrical and water services survived beneath the surface of the pavement. The boundary wall was built of red brick with foundations 2m deep cut into the natural sandstone. Large carved blocks of limestone were found in the demolition debris overlying the former road surface, which appear to be the capping stones of the brick wall on to which the railings were attached (Plate 6). To the east of the wall, inside the former burial ground, the soil had been subjected to the same re-deposition of material that was found in Trenches 2 and 3 to a depth of 2.8m. The material was a mixed orange brown silty sand and again was very clean with no rubble or rubbish, only two pieces of human bone were recovered.

6. Discussion

The site of St. Bartholomew's Chapel and its graveyard has been the subject of extensive ground disturbance since its closure and it would appear that a very thorough burial ground clearance took place sometime in the early 1960's. The ground seems to have been disturbed to a depth of approximately 3m across the entire area. The soil in the burial ground seems to have been excavated out and screened for human bone then replaced on the site. Very little

human bone was recovered during the evaluation and those that were, were small and probably avoided the screening process due to their size. For example, very few of the larger human long bones were found and those that were, were not complete but broken fragments.

The quantities of rubble found in Trench 1 confirm the location of the chapel, which had been thoroughly demolished so that nothing remained *in situ*. The chapel may have been demolished to its foundations in the 1940s and any masonry left was then disturbed and re-deposited during the later clearances of the 1960's. This may account for how some large pieces of masonry came to be so deeply buried.

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 CgMs Consulting at Plot 3 Masshouse, Birmingham City Centre, West Midlands (NGR SP 0760 8710). The evaluation was undertaken on the site of St. Bartholomew's Chapel and burial ground to test for the presence of surviving human remains and for the foundations of the chapel. St. Bartholomew's Chapel and its burial ground were built in the mid-18th century on the eastern edge of the city. The burial ground was closed to further burials in the mid-19th century and became a park while the chapel itself continued in use until its closure in 1937. The chapel was demolished in 1943 and by the 1960s the site had become a Birmingham City Council car park. Anecdotal evidence of this time suggested that the burial ground had been cleared but this was not known for certain.

Four trial trenches were excavated across the car park on the 5th and 6th August 2002. The trenching showed that the site of St. Bartholomew's Chapel and its burial ground has been the subject of extensive ground disturbance since its closure and it would appear that a thorough burial ground clearance took place sometime in the early 1960s. The ground seems to have been disturbed to a depth of approximately 3m across the entire area. The only evidence for the chapel was rubble and a collapsed wall at the northwestern edge of the site.

8. The archive

The archive consists of:

- 2 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 3 Photographic records AS3
- 1 Colour transparency film
- 1 Black and white photographic films
- 4 Trench record cards
- 3 Scale plans
- 1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Birmingham City Museum

9. Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank Cathy Mould of CgMs Consulting and Birmingham City Council's Planning Archaeologist Dr Mike Hodder for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project.

10. Personnel

Chris Patrick led the fieldwork and report preparation. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Hal Dalwood. James Goad, Simon Griffin and Richard Lee undertook fieldwork. Illustration was by Simon Griffin and Carolyn Hunt.

11. Bibliography

BUFAU, 2001a *An archaeological desk-based assessment of Birmingham Eastside*

BUFAU, 2001b *An archaeological watching brief at Masshouse Circus, Birmingham*

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

CgMs, 2002 *Specification for Archaeological Evaluation Plot 3, Masshouse, Birmingham.*

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

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 25m Width: 1.8m Depth: 0-2.4m

Orientation: E-W

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
1000	Car park surface	Tarmac with a thin layer of road stone underneath.	0-0.1m
1001	Layer	Layer of made ground consisting of orange brown silty sand and a large quantity of rubble.	0.1-2.4m
1002	Wall	Large fragment of brick wall set with in made ground layer.	1.5m
1004	Natural	Bromsgrove sandstone overlain by gravel	2.4m

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 20m Width: 1.8m Depth: 0-3m

Orientation: NE-SW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
2000	Car park surface	Tarmac with a thin layer of road stone underneath.	0-0.1m
2001	Layer	Layer of made ground consisting of orange brown silty sand with re-deposited Bromsgrove sandstone	0.1-3m
2003	Natural	Bromsgrove sandstone	3m

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 20m Width: 1.8m Depth: 0-3.1m

Orientation: NW-SE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
3000	Car park surface	Tarmac with a thin layer of road stone underneath.	0-0.1m
3001	Layer	Layer of made ground consisting of orange brown silty sand with re-deposited Bromsgrove sandstone, some brick rubble.	0.1-3.1m
3003	Natural	Bromsgrove sandstone	3.1m

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 15m Width: 1.8m Depth: 0-2.8m

Orientation: E-W

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
4000	Modern car park surface	Tarmac with a layer of road stone underneath	0-0.36m
4001	Layer	Layer of compact mixed sandy silt with fragments of stone overlying former road and pavement 4003, 4004	0.36-0.48m
4002	Layer	Layer of made ground consisting of medium brown silty sand with fragments of brick and stone	0.36-2.8m
4003	Layer	Buried tarmac road surface	0.48m+
4004	Structure	Buried former pavement of blue bricks with granite kerbstones	0.48m+
4005	Layer	Compact dark greyish brown silty sand; make up layer under pavement. cut by disused services	0.62m+
4006	Layer	Mid brown sandy gravel, underlies 4007	0.8m+
4007	Layer	Light brown sandy gravel over 4006, make up layer for path 4004	0.7m+
4008	Layer	Clinker-ash layer overlying 4007, make up layer for path	0.64m+

4009	Structure	Brick built wall of former burial ground.	0.6-2m
4010	Cut	Construction cut of 4009	0.6-2m
4011	Layer	Same as 4002	



Figure 1: Location of the site.

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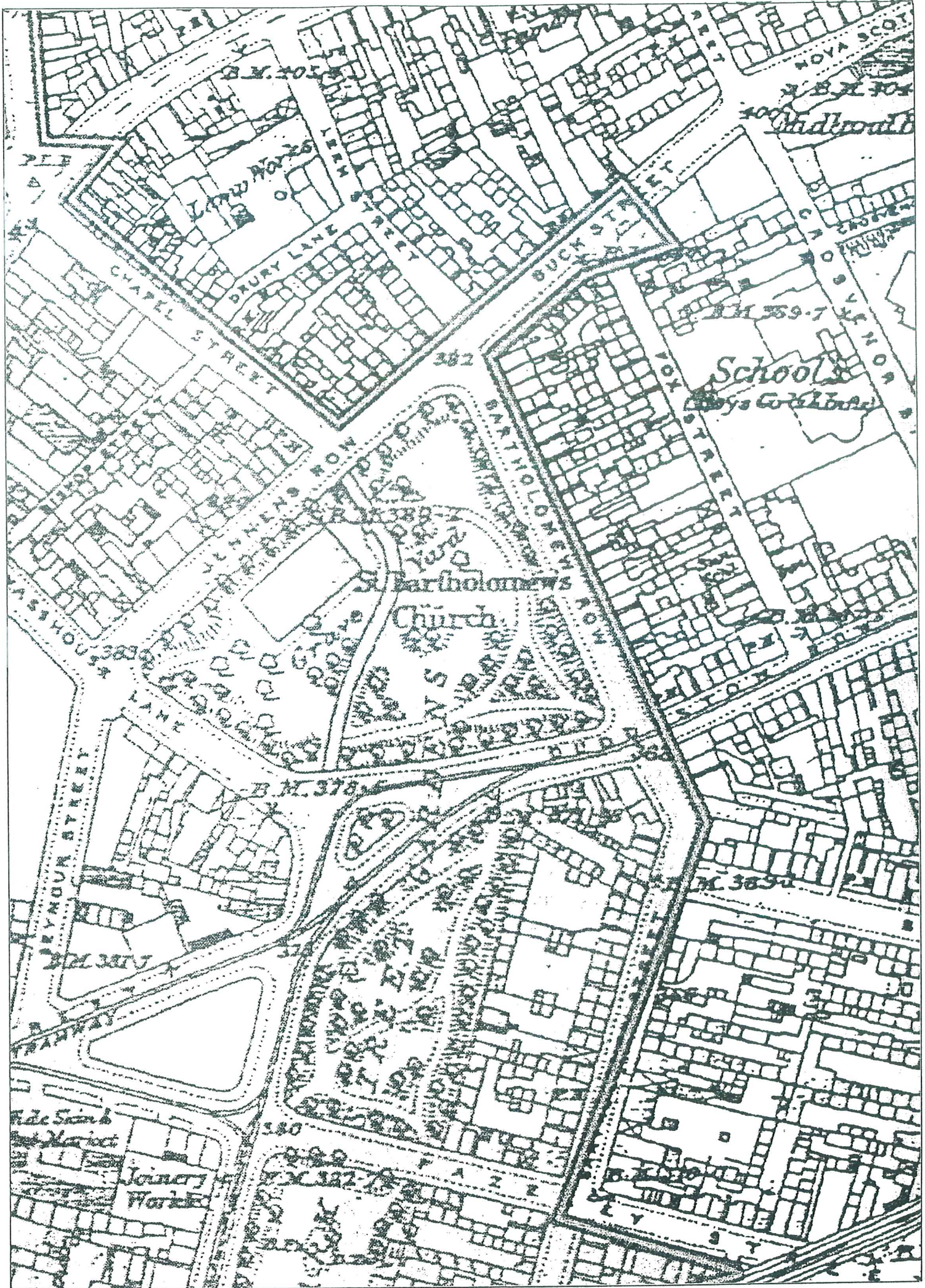


Figure 2

Ordnance Survey 1890

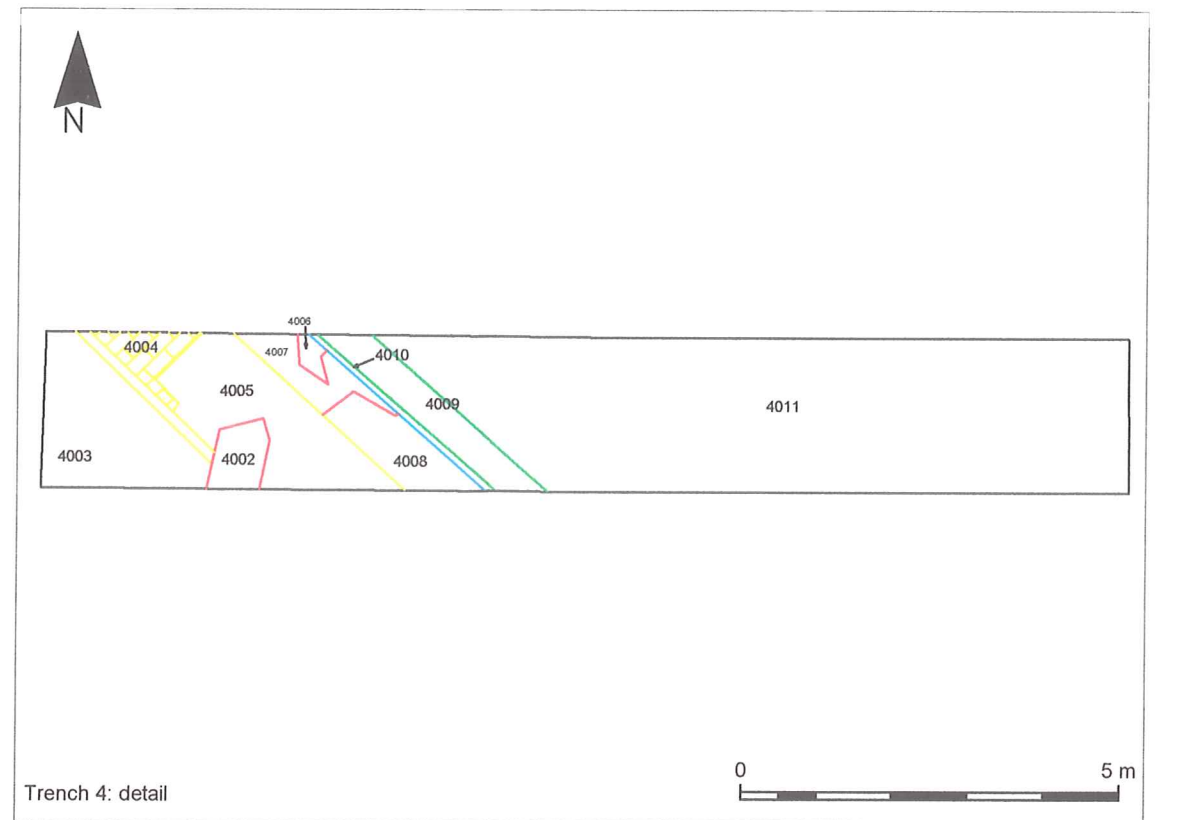
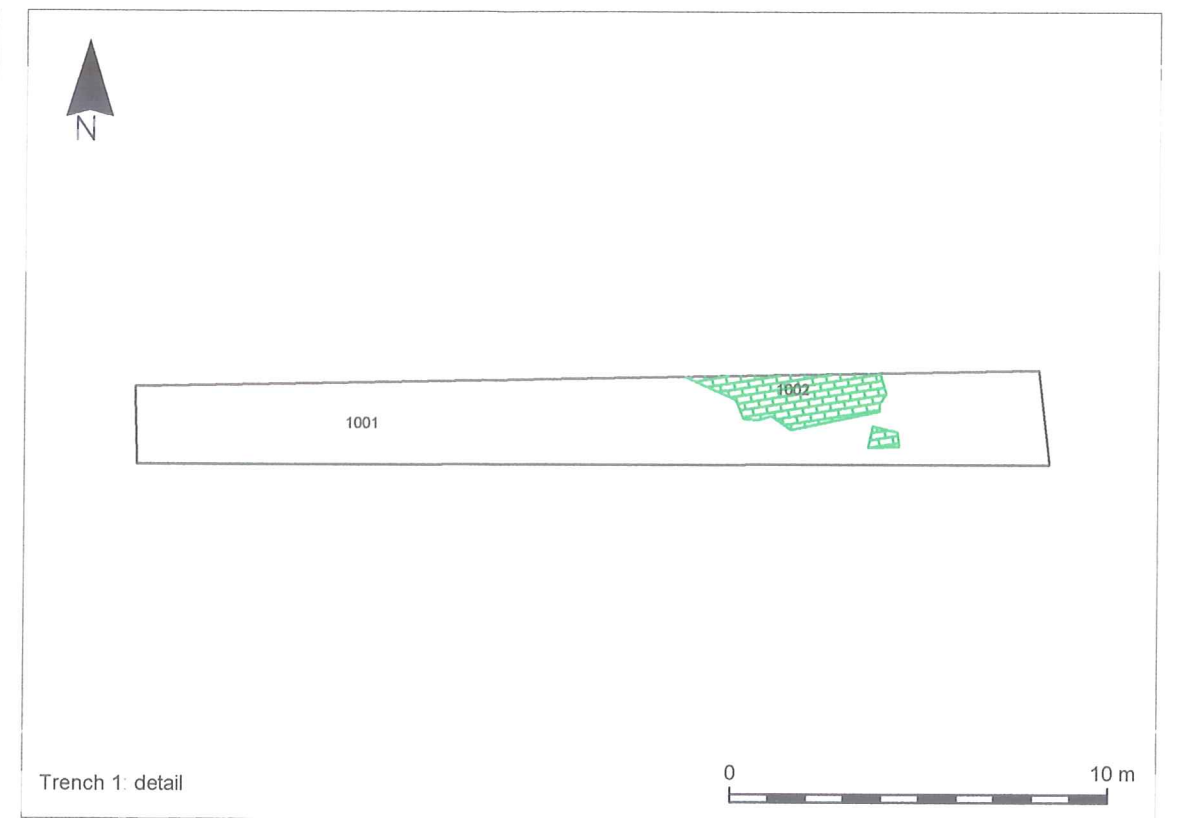
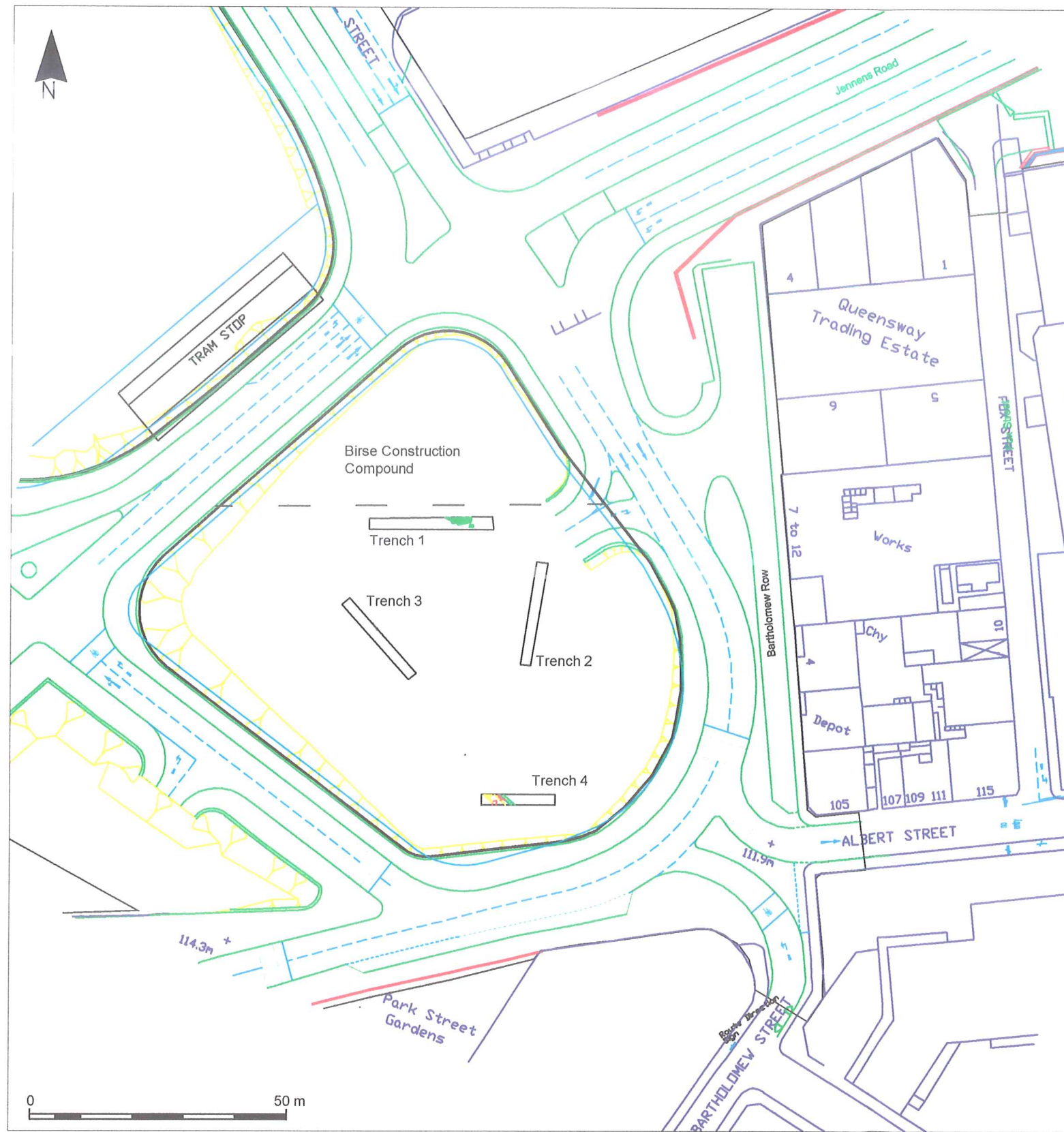


Figure 3: Total Station Survey, trench locations and detail, located to contractors base plan



Plate 1, Collapsed wall in Trench 1



Plate 2, Carved stone from the chapel



Plate 3, Evidence of tipping in Trench 2



Plate 4, Machining of Trench 3



Plate 5, Former Masshouse Lane road surface in Trench 4



Plate 6, Former burial ground perimeter wall capping stones from Trench 4