

Desk-based assessment  
at  
The Thimblemill Public House,  
174, Thimblemill Road,  
Smethwick,  
Sandwell



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Worcestershire Archaeology  
Archive and Archaeology Service  
The Hive, Sawmill Walk,  
The Butts, Worcester  
WR1 3PB

Date: 13 March 2014  
Author: Elizabeth Connolly, [econnolly1@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:econnolly1@worcestershire.gov.uk)  
Illustrator: Carolyn Hunt  
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## Contents

### Summary

1

## Report

<b>1 Background.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Reasons for the project .....	3
1.2 Planning background.....	3
<b>2 Aims.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3 Methods.....</b>	<b>3</b>
3.1 Personnel.....	3
3.2 Documentary research .....	3
3.3 List of sources consulted .....	4
3.4 Other methods .....	5
3.5 Impact assessment criteria.....	5
<b>4 The application site .....</b>	<b>6</b>
4.1 Location and size .....	6
4.2 Topography, geology and soils.....	6
4.3 Current land-use .....	6
4.4 Historic land-use and archaeological character .....	6
<b>5 Heritage assets .....</b>	<b>7</b>
5.1 Designated heritage assets .....	7
5.2 Undesignated heritage assets .....	7
5.3 Potential heritage assets .....	7
<b>6 Assessment of the significance of heritage assets .....</b>	<b>8</b>
6.1 Designated assets.....	8
6.1.1 Listed building.....	8
6.2 Undesignated assets.....	8
6.2.1 Sites of archaeological interest .....	8
<b>7 The impact of the development .....</b>	<b>8</b>
7.1 Impacts during construction.....	8
7.2 Impacts on sustainability .....	9
7.3 Residual impacts.....	9
<b>8 Recommendations.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>9 Publication summary .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>10 Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>9</b>



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## **Desk-based assessment at The Thimblemill Public House, 174, Thimblemill Road, Smethwick, Sandwell**

Elizabeth Connolly

### **Summary**

A desk-based assessment for the historic environment was undertaken at The Thimblemill Public House, 174, Thimblemill Road, Smethwick, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough (NGR 401650 287020). It was undertaken on behalf of Brooke Smith Planning, whose client proposes the demolition of the existing Thimblemill Public House and residential redevelopment, for which a planning application has been submitted to Sandwell Metropolitan Borough.

This report describes and assesses the significance of the heritage assets (and potential heritage assets) that are potentially affected by the application. The setting of heritage assets is considered. The potential impact of the application, and the need for further on-site evaluation, is assessed.

The Thimblemill public house was named after the site of a watermill which formerly stood slightly to the north of the site. The mill, which is depicted on Yates' map of 1775, had fallen out of use by 1890. There is no indication that buildings associated with the mill existed on the site of the public house. The public house, with associated cellar, appears to have been terraced into the slope, with the construction of a bowling green behind. It is concluded that there is a low potential for the presence of archaeological deposits on the site so the impact of the development on below ground deposits is likely to be minimal.



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## Report

### 1 Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

A desk-based assessment for the historic environment was undertaken at The Thimblemill Public House, 174, Thimblemill Road, Smethwick, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough (NGR 401650 287020; Fig 1). It was undertaken on behalf of Brooke Smith Planning, whose client proposes the demolition of the existing Thimblemill Public House and club house (NGR 401650 287020) and the erection of a purpose built care home together with associated parking, landscaping, cycle and refuse storage. A planning application has been submitted to Sandwell Metropolitan District Council (reference number DC/14/56747).

The proposed development site lies within an Area of Potential Archaeological Importance (APAI) as designated by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

The project conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2014) and to the *Standard and guidance for historic environment desk-based assessment* (IfA 2012).

#### 1.2 Planning background

Present government planning policy is contained within the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012). This is supplemented by detailed guidance which had related to earlier government policy but which is at least partially still relevant to the present policy (DCLG/DCMS/EH 2010).

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document requires that "for Areas of Potential Archaeological Importance (APAI) and any other areas where the Council considers there to be archaeological potential, the local planning authority will require archaeological information (derived, if necessary, from an archaeological evaluation), prior to the determination of planning applications."

### 2 Aims

The general aims of this assessment are to:

- collect relevant information relating to the historic environment potential of the proposed development area;
- assess the potential significance of any heritage assets;
- assess the impact of the proposed development on these heritage assets;
- recommend mitigation measures to the Client, to offset detrimental effects of the development.

### 3 Methods

#### 3.1 Personnel

The assessment was undertaken by Elizabeth Connolly MA; who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2013 and has been practicing archaeology since 1999. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan MA, IfA who joined WA in 2001 and has been practising archaeology since 1991. Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt BSc MifA.

#### 3.2 Documentary research

All relevant information on the history of the site and past land-use was collected and assessed. Records of known archaeological sites and monuments were obtained from Sandwell Historic

Environment Record (HER). Historic maps and published sources were consulted at Sandwell Record Office.

It was not possible within the scope of this project to consult the tithe plan for the site of the proposed development, as it was unavailable.

The results are mapped on Figure 2 and the details of individual features of the historic environment are given in Appendix 1. Event records have been omitted where this would repeat information in other record types, and would not materially affect the assessment. HER references have been used throughout this assessment.

This document assesses the below-ground archaeological potential of the site of the proposed development. The buildings themselves have been assessed in a separate report prepared by English Heritage (2013) and included in this report as Appendix 2.

### **3.3 List of sources consulted**

#### *Cartographic sources*

William Yates' map of Staffordshire, 1775

Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition map of Staffordshire, 1890, scale 1:2,500

Ordnance Survey map of Staffordshire, 1904, scale 1:2,500

Ordnance Survey map of Staffordshire, 1918, scale 1:2500

Ordnance Survey map of Warwickshire, 1938, scale 1:10,560

Ordnance Survey map of Staffordshire, 1957, scale 1:2,500

Ordnance Survey map of Warwickshire, 1974, scale 1:10,000

#### *Documentary sources*

Arc Environmental, 2013 *Desk top study report, proposed care facility development. The Thimblemill Public House, Thimblemill Road, Smethwick*, dated May 2013

DCLG 2012 *National Planning Policy Framework*, Department for Communities and Local Government

DCLG/DCMS/EH 2010 *PPS5 Planning for the historic environment: historic environment planning practice guide*, Department for Communities and Local Government/Department for Culture, Media and Sport/English Heritage

English Heritage 2011 *The setting of heritage assets*

English Heritage 2013 *Birmingham inter-war Public Houses :The Thimblemill Inn and associated bottle store, bowling pavilion and retaining wall, Sandwell*, Advice Report, Case Number 479372, dated 4 October 2013

IfA 2012 *Standard and guidance for historic environment desk-based assessment*, Institute for Archaeologists, updated 16 November 2012

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, 2012 *Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan*, December 2012,

[www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/4328/site\\_allocations\\_and\\_delivery\\_dpd\\_december\\_2012](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/4328/site_allocations_and_delivery_dpd_december_2012)

M.W. Greenslade (Ed) 1976 *A History of the County of Stafford: Vol 17: Offlow Hundred*, Victoria County History, accessed online at [www.british-history.ac.uk/Default.aspx](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/Default.aspx) on 12 March 2014

WA 2014 *Written Scheme of Investigation for a desk based assessment at The Thimblemill Public House, Smethwick, Sandwell*, Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 27 February 2014, P4309



### 3.4 Other methods

A site visit was undertaken on 6 March 2014.

### 3.5 Impact assessment criteria

The criteria cited in Table 1 have been used.

<p><b>Major Beneficial:</b> Demonstrable improvement to a designated heritage asset of the highest order (or its setting), or non-designated asset (or its setting) of archaeological interest of demonstrable significance equal to that of a scheduled monument. Designated assets will include scheduled monuments, grade I/II* listed buildings, grade I/II* registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields, protected wrecks or World Heritage Sites. Improvement may be in the asset's management, its amenity value, setting, or documentation (for instance enhancing its research value). It may also be in better revealing a World Heritage Site or Conservation Area's significance.</p>
<p><b>Beneficial:</b> Demonstrable improvement to a designated heritage asset (or its setting), or non-designated asset (or its setting) of archaeological interest such that the level of improvement will demonstrably have a minor affect the area and its heritage resource, either at a local or regional level. For instance grade II listed buildings, Conservation Areas and undesignated heritage assets important at a sub-national level. Improvement may be in the asset's management, its amenity value, setting, or documentation (for instance enhancing its research value).</p>
<p><b>Not Significant:</b> Impacts that have no long-term effect on any heritage asset.</p>
<p><b>Minor Adverse:</b> Minor harm to a designated heritage asset (or its setting), or non-designated asset (or its setting) of archaeological interest such that the level of harm will demonstrably have a minor affect the area and its heritage resource, either at a local or regional level. For instance grade II listed buildings, Conservation Areas and undesignated heritage assets important at a sub-national level.</p>
<p><b>Moderate Adverse:</b> Minor harm to a designated heritage asset (or its setting) of the highest significance, or non-designated asset (or its setting) of archaeological interest of demonstrable significance equal to that of a scheduled monument. For instance scheduled monuments, grade I/II* listed buildings, grade I/II* registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields, protected wrecks or World Heritage Sites.</p> <p>Harm to a designated heritage asset (or its setting), or non-designated asset (or its setting) of archaeological interest such that the level of harm will demonstrably affect the area and its heritage resource, either at a local or regional level. For instance grade II listed buildings, Conservation Areas and undesignated heritage assets important at a sub-national level.</p>
<p><b>Major Adverse:</b> Harm to a designated heritage asset (or its setting) of the highest significance, or non-designated asset (or its setting) of archaeological interest of demonstrable significance equal to that of a scheduled monument. For instance scheduled monuments, grade I/II* listed buildings, grade I/II* registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields, protected wrecks, World Heritage Sites or harm to a building or other element that makes a positive contribution to the significance of a Conservation Area as a whole.</p> <p>Substantial harm to, or loss of, a designated heritage asset (or its setting), or non-designated asset (or its setting) of archaeological interest such that the level of harm or loss will demonstrably affect the area and its heritage resource, either at a local or regional level. For instance grade II listed buildings, Conservation Areas and undesignated heritage assets important at a sub-national level.</p>
<p><b>Severe Adverse:</b> Substantial harm to, or loss of, a designated heritage asset (or its setting) of the highest significance, or non-designated asset (or its setting) of archaeological interest of demonstrable significance equal to that of a scheduled monument. For instance scheduled monuments, grade I/II* listed buildings, grade I/II* registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields, protected wrecks, World Heritage Sites or the loss of a building or other element that makes a positive contribution to the significance of a Conservation Area as a whole.</p>
<p><b>Unknown:</b> Where there is insufficient information to determine either significance or impact for any heritage asset, or where a heritage asset is likely to exist but this has not been established, or where there is insufficient evidence for the absence of a heritage asset. For instance where further information will enable the planning authority to make an informed decision.</p>

*Table 1: Impact assessment criteria for heritage asset*

## **4 The application site**

### **4.1 Location and size**

The study area included the application site (Fig 1), although heritage assets were considered within 500m of the site in order to provide a broader understanding of the local context (Fig 2). The site is 0.44ha in area.

### **4.2 Topography, geology and soils**

The site is underlain by the Kidderminster Formation (Sherwood Sandstone group) deposited during the Triassic period. These normally comprise interbedded sandstone and siltstone lithologies. No drift deposits are recorded in the immediate area, however a thin layer of residual soil may be present below the site which may resemble gravelly sandy clay deposits (Arc Environmental 2013, 4).

### **4.3 Current land-use**

The site (Plates 1-3) comprises a large sub-square plot at the junction of Thimblemill Road and Norman Road and is bounded by Pargeter Road to the east. It is occupied by the disused Thimblemill public house with a tarmac car parking area to the front (to the north), bounded by a low red-brick wall. There is a gentle rise from street level to the pub building. There is a beer garden to the rear (Plate 4), with a bowling green and pavilion revetted by a mortared stone wall (c 3m high) to the rear of the pub (Plates 4 and 5), accessed by a stairwell which forms part of the revetting structure. There is a cellar below the existing pub. This was not accessed during the site visit.

The land rises above the bowling green to the south, to housing, banked up and revetted with drystone walls using regular small stone blocks (Plate 6). There is mature garden type vegetation (e.g. laurels and conifers) along the southern boundary of the site.

The site of Thimble Mill (1650-MBL2604) and the mill pond, visible from the north of the site of the proposed development, is under thick vegetation behind metal railings. The site is overlooked to the north east by a multi-storey tower block, behind the Warley Branch Library building (13427-MBL5322), however the site of the proposed development overlooks the library building itself (Plates 7 and 8).

### **4.4 Historic land-use and archaeological character**

The earliest find recorded in the area is a medieval forgery of a silver groat (HER 6029-MBL3062) from approximately 450m north of the site of the proposed development.

The following history of Smethwick is taken from the Victoria County History of Staffordshire (1976).

Smethwick was originally a township within the parish of Harborne to the west of Birmingham. The name Smethwick has been variously interpreted as 'the smith's dwelling' or the 'village on the plain'. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century Smethwick was a thinly populated rural area and in 1675 it was described as a 'discontinued village', strung out along the Birmingham-Dudley road. The first church was opened in 1732. The cutting of the Birmingham canal through the northern part of the township in 1768-9 brought some industrial development. As a result there was a sharp rise in the population of the district although by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century settlement was still scattered. The number of industries continued to increase, particularly with the opening of Telford's new canal in the later 1820s. Development was very rapid in the 1830s with the New Village growing up on either side of the Birmingham to Dudley road north of the old centre round Bearwood Hill. The first railway through the town was completed in 1852. In the early 1870s, Smethwick and Dudley Port 'with a thousand swarming hives of metallurgical industries... too numerous to mention', were contrasted with other Black Country towns which specialised in one or two specific types of metalware. Several firms associated with metalwork and engineering became established in the

town, James Watt having opened the Soho Foundry there in the late 1790s 'for the purpose of casting everything related to our steam engines'. Several firms in Smethwick were engaged in the manufacture of metal bedsteads.

The Thimble Mill is marked on Yates' Map of Staffordshire (1775; Fig 3). On the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig 4) this is marked as Thimble Mill (disused) with the mill pond clearly marked as Thimblemill pool. The site of the proposed development is depicted as part of a large field, bounded by tree-lined Thimblemill Lane to the north-east, and with a footpath running beyond the western field boundary. By 1904 there is no reference to the Thimble Mill, and Thimblemill Lane is now Thimblemill Road with no trees marked. On the 1918 OS map the site of the proposed development is shown still as part of a large field but between two roads; Pargeter Road to the east and Norman Road to the west, running roughly north-east by south-west, with housing developments encroaching on the area from the east and south. On the 1938 1:10,560 map a narrow building on an east to west axis is shown at the location of the current disused Thimblemill pub. On the 1957 map, the building has been extended and is marked as 'The Thimble Mill (P.H.)'. A bowling green and pavilion are now depicted to the rear of the building, with the public house, bowling green and pavilion occupying their current plot, abutted by residential development.

The mill which gave Thimblemill Brook its name stood on the brook near what is now the junction of Thimblemill Road and Norman Road, in the part of Oldbury that was acquired by Smethwick in 1928. It probably began as a corn-mill and was later converted to thimble-making (the thimbles were units of measurement for alcohol). It was known as the Thimble Mill by 1775. By 1837, however, it was being used by W. W. Blyth for the cutting of files by machinery, a pioneer venture that resulted from the patent taken out in 1833 by William Shilton of Birmingham. William Summerton moved to the Thimble Mill from Oldbury mill in 1845 and used it as a corn-mill. He remained there about nine years. The Thimble Mill was still standing in the late 1880s.

## **5 Heritage assets**

### **5.1 Designated heritage assets**

There are two Grade II listed buildings within the search area. Warley Branch Library (13427-MBL5322; Plate 7) is overlooked by the site, and is just across the road to the north-east. Built in 1937 by the Smethwick Borough Engineer Roland Fletcher and the architect Chester Button, in the Moderne style.

Smethwick Baths (13426-MBL5321; Plate 10) are located c 450m south-east of the site of the proposed development. This was built in 1933 as public baths, also by the Smethwick Borough Engineer Roland Fletcher and the architect Chester Button. The building is reinforced concrete, partly in brick; flat concrete roofs in the Moderne style.

### **5.2 Undesignated heritage assets**

The site of a watermill known as the Thimble Mill (1650-MBL2604; Plate 9) is c 50m to the north-west of the site of the proposed development. The mill was in existence in 1775, as depicted on Yates' Map of Staffordshire. The 'thimbles' were measures for alcoholic spirit. The site is marked as 'Thimble Mill (disused)' on the 1890 OS map. There are now no remaining surface traces of it. The pool, with the dam on the east side still survives. The pool was reduced in size on the north-east by the straightening of Thimblemill Road between 1904 and 1918.

### **5.3 Potential heritage assets**

No potential heritage assets are considered to exist in the application area.

## 6 Assessment of the significance of heritage assets

### 6.1 Designated assets

There are no scheduled ancient monuments, registered battlefields, registered parks and gardens, or wrecks found within the search area. The site of the proposed development is not within a conservation area.

#### 6.1.1 Listed building

Warley Branch Library (HER 13427-MBL5322) is overlooked by the site and is a distinctive building at this location, at a road junction where it is visible from several angles. The nature of the streetscape is already mixed, comprising low rise residential, high rise residential and housing developments. The site of the Thimble Mill (HER 1650-MBL2604) across the road is under tree cover and with its associated pool adds to the interest of this location. A residential care home at this site location would have a **Not Significant** effect on the setting of the Warley Branch Public Library.

Smethwick Baths (HER 13426-MBL5321) are located c 250m south-east of the site of the proposed development, and are just visible from the pavement north of the site. Given the already mixed nature of the streetscape which adds to its interest, it is considered that the proposed development will have a **Not Significant** effect on the setting of Smethwick Baths.

### 6.2 Undesignated assets

#### 6.2.1 Sites of archaeological interest

The site of the former Thimble Mill (HER 1650-MBL2604) lies c 50m to the north-west of the site. No above ground remains of the buildings are known to survive. The only remaining element of the former mill complex is the mill pond which was heavily landscaped in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to form a recreational pool, which was reduced in size on the north-east by the straightening of Thimblemill Road between 1904 and 1918. The proposed development is considered to have a **Not Significant** impact on the setting of the site of the Thimble Mill.

##### *Nature of the archaeological interest in the site*

There is no evidence of below ground archaeological remains at the site of the proposed development. No evidence exists of buildings at this site associated with the nearby Thimble Mill.

##### *Physical extent of the archaeological interest in the site*

It has been suggested that made ground is likely to be present on site (Arc Environmental 2013), however it is also possible that the Thimblemill Pub was built on ground terraced from a natural rise in the ground, and that the bowling green behind was similarly terraced. This would suggest that there is a low possibility of the survival of below ground archaeological deposits at this location.

## 7 The impact of the development

No documentary evidence was found within the scope of this report to support the survival of below ground archaeological remains within the development area. Furthermore the existence of a revetment wall to the rear of the pub suggests that the slope on which it was constructed was terraced prior to its construction and this, and the cellar of the pub, would have destroyed archaeological features within the development area.

### 7.1 Impacts during construction

There is no documentary or physical evidence to suggest that ground works associated with the proposed development will impact on below surface archaeological deposits.

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## 7.2 Impacts on sustainability

The historic environment is a non-renewable resource and therefore cannot be directly replaced. However mitigation through recording and investigation also produces an important research dividend that can be used for the better understanding of the area's history and contribute to local and regional research agendas (cf NPPF, DCLG 2012, section 141).

## 7.3 Residual impacts

The proposed development is sited within a mixed urban residential streetscape. Retention of the name of the Thimblemill would add to the interest of this location, as an indicator of a facet of its heritage and could thus have a **Beneficial** impact on the setting of the site of the former Thimble Mill. Otherwise the proposed development is considered to have a **Not Significant** impact on the setting of the site of the former Thimble Mill (HER 1650-MBL2604); the Warley Branch Public Library (HER 13427-MBL5322) and Smethwick Baths (HER 13426-MBL5321).

## 8 Recommendations

No further mitigation is recommended.

## 9 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.

*A desk-based assessment for the historic environment was undertaken at The Thimblemill Public House, 174, Thimblemill Road, Smethwick, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough (NGR 401650 287020). It was undertaken on behalf of Brooke Smith Planning, whose client proposes the demolition of the existing Thimblemill Public House and residential redevelopment, for which a planning application has been submitted to Sandwell Metropolitan Borough.*

*This report describes and assesses the significance of the heritage assets (and potential heritage assets) that are potentially affected by the application. The setting of heritage assets is considered. The potential impact of the application, and the need for further on-site evaluation, is assessed.*

*The Thimblemill public house was named after the site of a watermill which formerly stood slightly to the north of the site. The mill, which is depicted on Yates' map of 1775, had fallen out of use by 1890. There is no indication that buildings associated with the mill existed on the site of the public house. The public house, with associated cellar, appears to have been terraced into the slope, with the construction of a bowling green behind. It is concluded that there is a low potential for the survival of archaeological deposits on the site and that the impact of the development is likely to be minimal.*

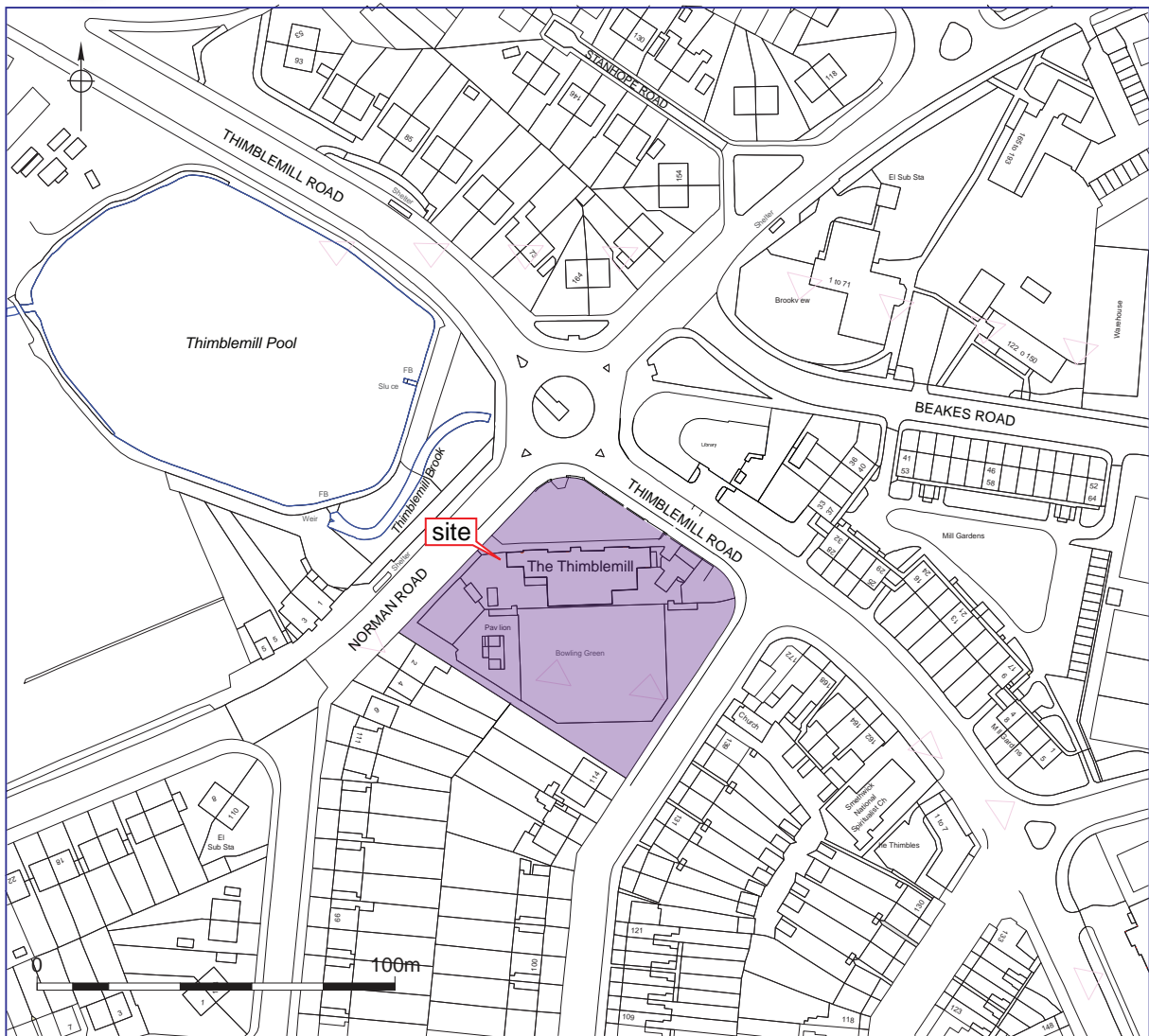
## 10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Andrea Caplan (Associate Director, Brooke-Smith Planning) and Mark Stretton (Conservation Officer, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council).



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# Figures

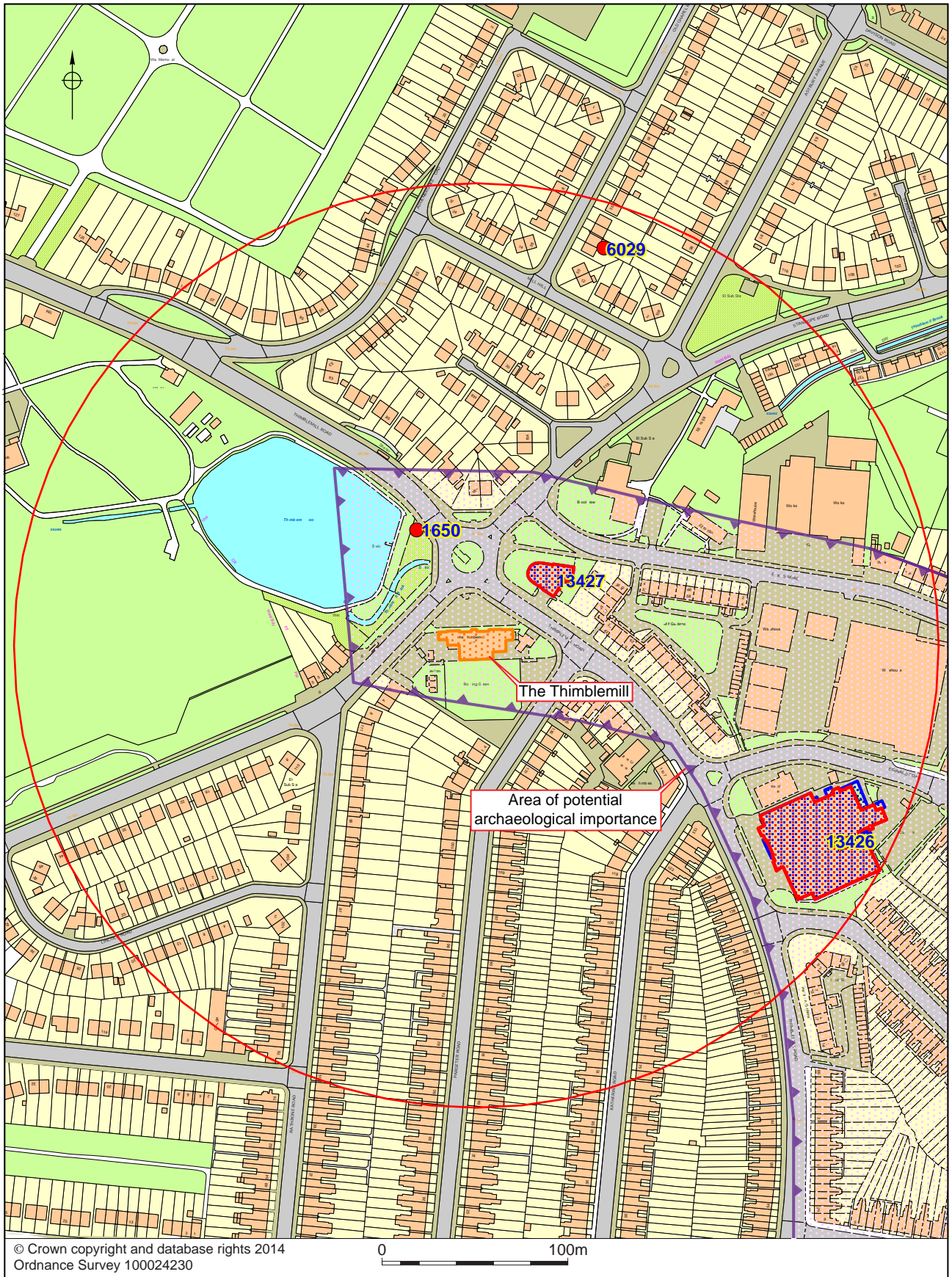


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Location of the site

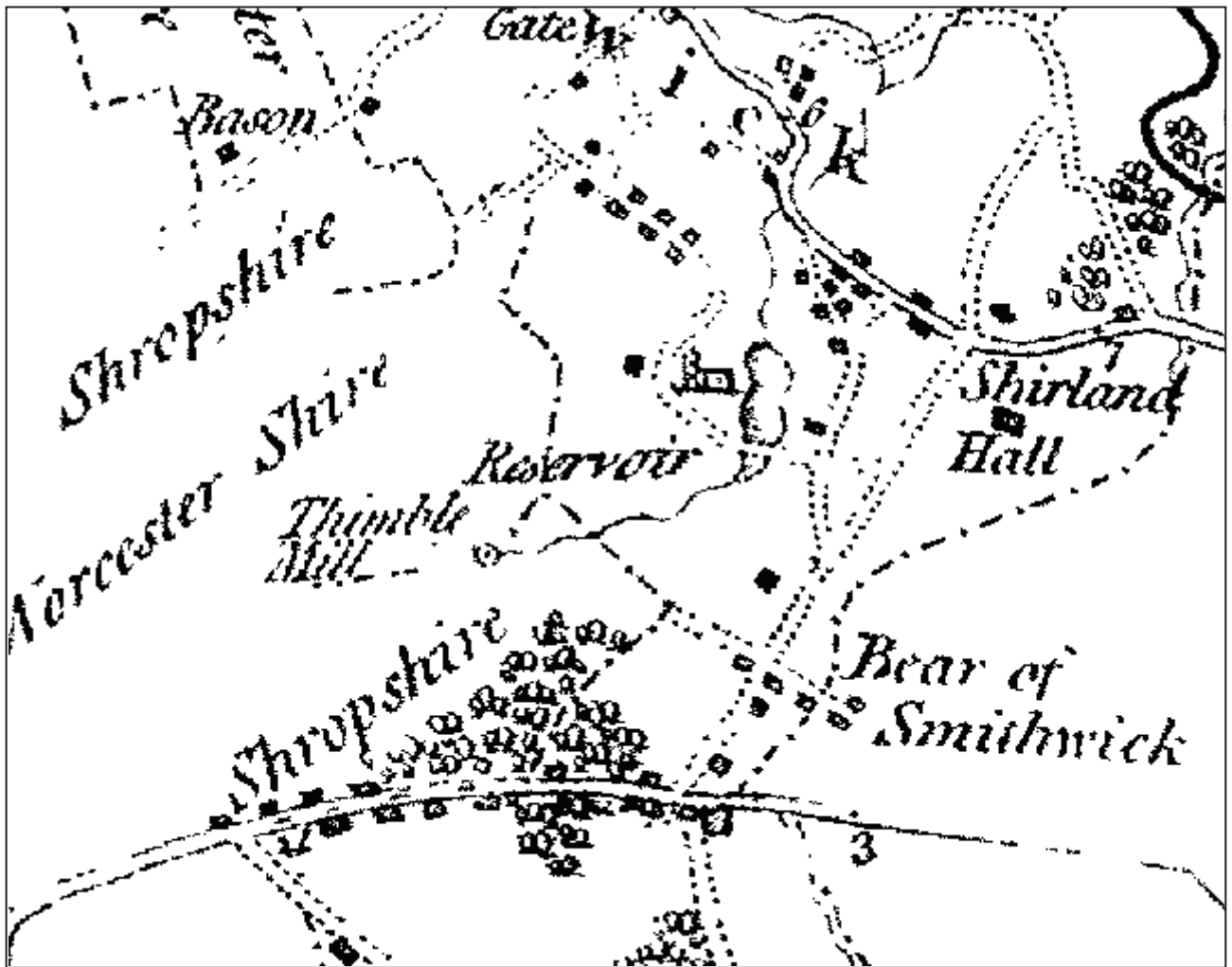
Figure 1





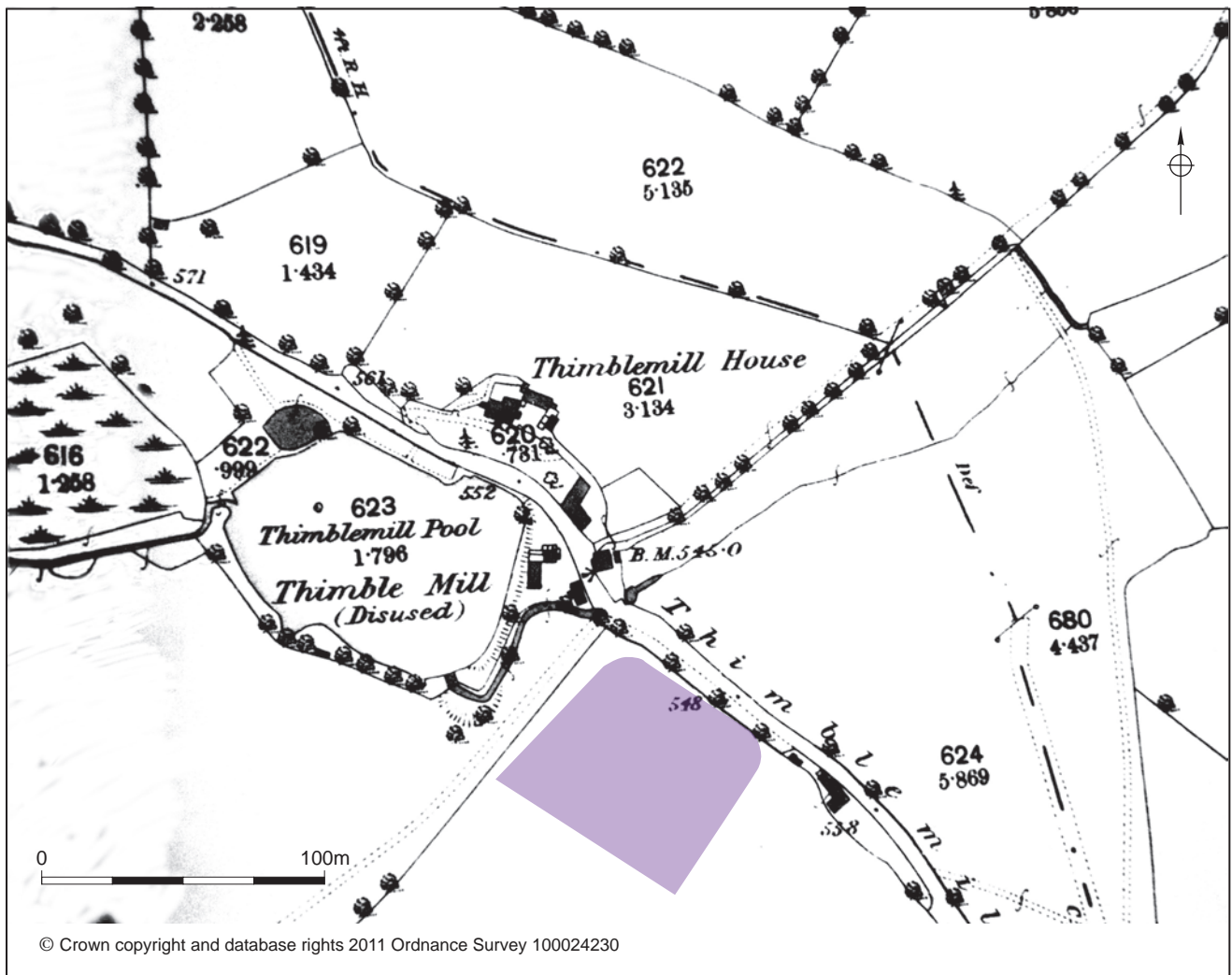
Extact of Sandwell HER showing study area

Figure 2



Detail of Yates' map of Staffordshire, 1775.

Figure 3



Extract from the OS 1st Edition, 1890

Figure 4

## Plates



*Plate 1 Public house and car park to front, from north*



*Plate 2 Site from north east, from Warley Branch Library  
(HER 13427-MBL5322)*





*Plate 3 Site from north-west, from near the site of the Thimble Mill (HER 1650-MBL2604)*



*Plate 4 Beer garden to rear, showing the revetting wall to the bowling green and the pavilion building, from north*



*Plate 5 Bowling green and revetting wall from west*



*Plate 6 Detail of boundary to south*

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*Plate 7 Bowling green, rear of pub and Warley Branch Library, from south*



*Plate 8 Warley Branch Library, from front of site, from south*

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*Plate 9 Site of Thimble Mill from pub car park, from east*



*Plate 10 Looking east towards Smethwick Baths (HER 13426-MBL5321), from pavement in front of site*

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## Appendix 1 Heritage assets registered with the Historic Environment Record (those within the application site are indicated in bold)

HER number (and legal status)	Site name	Grid reference	Record type	Date	Description
13426-MBL5321	Smethwick Baths, Thimblemill Road	SP 0183 8692	Building	Modern	Grade II listed building. Public Baths, 1933 by the Smethwick Borough Engineer Roland Fletcher and the architect Chester Button. Reinforced concrete, partly in brick; flat concrete roofs. Moderne style.
13427-MBL5322	Warley Branch Library, Thimblemill Road	SP 0169 8707	Building	Modern	Grade II listed building. Library, 1937, by the Smethwick Borough Engineer Roland Fletcher and the architect Chester Button. Monk bond with stack bonding to plinth; flat concrete roof. U-shaped plan, the Adult Lending Library being contained in a single storey oval which projects forward from the concave face of a two storey curved block with a stair tower to its rear elevation. Moderne style.
6069-MBL3062	Groat, 85 Old Chapel Road, Smethwick,	SP 0172 8725	Monument (Find spot)	Medieval (1066-1539AD)	Found by chance in garden at above address. Forgery of silver groat (4d) of EDIII. Coin copied is pre-treaty series C groat issued 1351-2. Silver plated base metal and is not cast; has been struck from dies deliberately made to produce coins that looked old and worn.
1650-MBL2604	Thimble Mill(site), Smethwick	SP 0161 8709	Monument	Watermill (Post Medieval)  Corn Mill (Post Medieval)	Thimble Mill. In existence 1775 (Yates Map of Staffordshire).  Early photo shows timber-framed building of 17 <sup>th</sup> century type. The 'thimbles' were measures for alcoholic spirit. By 1837 the mill was used for the machine cutting of files but from 1845 was a corn mill. Marked as Thimble Mill (disused) on 1890 OS map. There are now no remaining surface traces of it. The pool, with dam on east side still survives. Pool reduced in size on the north-east by the straightening of Thimblemill Road between 1904 and 1918.

**Appendix 2**

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# Case Name: BIRMINGHAM INTER-WAR PUBLIC HOUSES :The Thimblemill Inn and associated bottle store, bowling pavilion and retaining wall, Sandwell

**Case Number: 479372**

## Background

English Heritage is undertaking a project to consider a number of public houses in the West Midlands region dating from the period 1919-1939 for addition to the National Heritage List for England. Amongst them is The Thimblemill Inn, Sandwell.

## Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	EH Recommendation
1	N/A	The Thimblemill Inn and associated bottle store, bowling pavilion and retaining wall	Listing	Do not add to List

## Visits

Date	Visit Type
27 August 2013	Full inspection

## Context

The building was sold by Mitchells and Butlers to Enterprise Inns in 2007. They sold the building in 2012 and it ceased to be a public house then.

The building is locally listed. An article 4 notice was served by Sandwell MBC in 2013 to prevent unauthorised demolition. A pre-application enquiry for demolition and replacement with a care home on the site was received by the council in July 2013.

The building has been vacant since 2012 and vandalism and theft have occurred.

## Assessment

### CONSULTATION

A shortened period of 7 days for consultation was agreed in the light of continuing vandalism. Copies of our report were sent to the owner and to the local authority. The owner replied, pointing out the fact that vandalism had occurred and that this was largely responsible for the building's present, dilapidated state and had caused police involvement on site. They also pointed out that the building had changed hands several times in recent years and that it had failed to succeed as a business. The local authority made no response.

### DISCUSSION

The Revised Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (March 2010) state that buildings of pre-1700 date that contain a significant proportion of their original fabric are listed. Also, that most buildings of pre-1840 date are listed. After 1840, because of the greatly increased number of buildings erected and the much larger numbers that have survived, progressively greater selection is necessary

The English Heritage Listing Selection Guide for Commerce and Exchange Buildings (April 2011) notes that the great majority of pubs date from the C19, and because they survive in such large numbers, and were subject to a high degree of standardisation, selection for designation needs to be discriminating. It is noted that commercial premises are intrinsically prone to change and alteration and cannot be expected to survive in their original configuration. Careful assessment is needed as to whether enough survives for designation. Façades can sometimes be sufficiently interesting or rare architecturally to warrant listing even if the interior has been substantially altered or lost and vice versa. Other considerations include rarity, quality and survival of interiors, signage and community interest. The fact that pubs can vary in their design from region to region is noted, as is the distinctive house style adopted by certain breweries. The contribution that Birmingham made to the improved or reformed pub, with its appeal to 'respectable' drinkers is specifically noted. The Thimblemill Inn is a pub building of medium size, prominently sited on a roughly square site facing north towards a crossroads and set in an area of housing, much of which was built in the late 1920s and 1930s. It stands opposite to the Warley Branch Library of 1933 and close to the Smethwick Baths of 1937, both designed by the borough engineer, Roland Fletcher and both listed at Grade II.

Foster (see SOURCES, Wolverhampton Report) points out that the series of 'improved' pubs built for Mitchells and Butlers by Edwin F Reynolds starts with the Fox Hollies, Acocks Green of 1928 (demolished), and so the Thimblemill, opened in the same year, is amongst the first of these.

The external appearance of the building is essentially domestic to blend with the smaller, domestic buildings which surround it.

Inside, the essential elements of the original plan survive. The basement retains its barrel stands and drops and screened-off spirit store and the first floor kitchen and pantry are both still in situ. The ground floor has undergone greater change, although the essentials of a central public bar, smoking room to the west and a mixed or ladies' smoking room to the east, all follow the established pattern for a reformed pub of the period. However, although some of the original fittings can be seen, notably runs of benches in the three bars spaces, with heating pipes beneath, and two of the brick and tile fireplaces, the service areas to all three bar spaces have been considerably altered. In the western bar this consists of a completely rebuilt quadrant-shaped bar of particle board. The eastern bar has solid timbers to the corners, which have now been cut through, and may be original material, but much if not all of the rest of the bar structure and bar back date from the late-C20. The supporting structure beneath the bar counter in the public bar, and parts of its bar back, are original, but alterations here have included new shelving and the loss of some of the structure of the bar back.

An element of change is to be expected of a commercial building, but in this case the degree of alteration has been considerable. Other alterations and loss include the large flat-roofed function room which was added to the centre of the south front in the 1970s. This has obscured the former functioning of the ground floor, including the effective blocking of the centre of the terrace, an important element in the original plan which encouraged a flow out from the building onto the terrace and up to the garden and bowling green. The external bar, which connected with the central service area and is shown on the surviving architect's plan, has also gone. Other alterations include the addition to the south side of the bottle store.

Recent vandalism has also had a considerable effect on the building. This has included the smashing of windows and the lead came of their lights and, smashing of bench ends and the timber structure of one of the bars and the removal of tiles from the south slope of the main roof and stripping of tiles from the bowling pavilion and damage to the wooden lockers inside that building. The loss of the roof to the machine store at the rear of the pavilion appears to be older damage, but has also had an effect on the overall intact state of the building.

## CONCLUSION

After examining all the records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are not fulfilled. The Thimblemill Inn and its associated buildings cannot be recommended for statutory designation.

## REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

The former Thimblemill Inn, an 'improved' public house of 1928 designed by Wood, Kendrick and Edwin F Reynolds, together with its associated buildings, is not recommended for listing for the following principal reason:

\* Intactness: later alterations to the building, including the erection of a large function room to the rear and the consequent blocking of the terrace, together with the rebuilding of the service areas in two of the bars and alteration of a third, have obscured the original plan and functioning of the building. Vandalism has also wrought considerable damage to the structure and its fittings.

**Countersigning comments:**

Agreed. Although the former Thimblemill Inn is of interest as a reformed public house of the early C20, sadly the degree of alteration and loss means that it does not merit listing. It does, however, have considerable local interest.

Deborah Williams

4th October 2013

# Annex 1

## Factual Details

**Name:** The Thimblemill Inn and associated bottle store, bowling pavilion and retaining wall

**Location:** Thimblemill Road, Smethwick, West Midlands

County	District	District Type	Parish
	Sandwell	Metropolitan Authority	Non Civil Parish

## History

Large numbers of urban public houses had been built in Birmingham throughout the C19, especially following the Beerhouse Act of 1830. Drunkenness and bad behaviour were often claimed as the results and helped to fuel strong campaigns by temperance organisations, including the Salvation Army and many Black Country Nonconformist chapels, which had their own temperance groups.

The general perception that there were too many pubs led to the 1904 Licensing Act which established a fund to compensate landlords whose pubs were closed by the magistrates. A further incentive was the need to ensure that drunkenness did not damage the war effort and in 1916 Lloyd George went so far as to nationalise pubs near to munitions factories around Carlisle. The reaction to all of this by the brewing industry was to develop the 'improved' or 'reformed' public house which would attract respectable customers from the growing middle class. Early examples of this type of pub had included the Tabard Inn at Bedford Park in London, but Birmingham was amongst the first areas to pursue this pattern as a matter of policy.

Arthur Chamberlain, the Chairman of the Licensing Justices adopted a practice of 'fewer and better', closing inner city pubs and transferring their licenses to new public houses in the suburbs, and the licensing magistrates carefully scrutinised the plans and positioning of these new buildings. Charles Gore, the Bishop of Birmingham, said that 'the public houses ... ought to be on the lines of a German beer garden, where there was no reflection on a man, or his wife and children, if they are seen going in or coming out'. To this end the image of the buildings was often that of a manor house, either medieval, Tudor or Georgian, and the planning included spacious bar rooms, with family or function rooms and restaurants. A garden, with a bowling green and club house, was often included where space allowed. At the centre of the ground floor was a service area, largely surrounded by bar counters, which allowed for efficient working and also the monitoring of customers' behaviour.

At the same time there developed a policy amongst several of the brewers for improving some city centre pubs along the overall lines of respectability and spaciousness, by shutting down the smaller premises and rebuilding selected properties with licenses to a new standard.

The Thimblemill Inn was a new-build public house which was designed and approved by the Smethwick Licensing Committee in 1928 and opened to the public on 5 April that year.

Later additions and alterations have included the addition in the 1970s of a single-storied function room with flat roof, connected to the centre of the south side and built across the centre of the rear terrace. The western doorway on the north side, which perhaps led to an off-sales counter has been blocked. An extension to the south-west side of the bottle store appears to date from the mid-C20.

## Details

A public house of 1928, designed by Wood, Kendrick and Edwin F Reynolds of Birmingham for the brewers Mitchells and Butlers. The building is loosely Tudor in style.

**MATERIALS:** variegated brick laid in Flemish bond, with some later colour wash, and stone dressings, and a hipped roof with sprocketed eaves of plain tiles.

**PLAN:** the building is set on a generous, approximately square site, bounded on three sides by Pargeter Road (North-West), Thimblemill Road (S-W) and Norman Road (S-E). The pub building is angled at roughly 45 degrees, so that its north face fronts onto the cross roads formed by Thimblemill Road and Norman Road. To its south is a flagged terrace and a high wall with steps which lead up to a bowling green and a detached

club house. Architects' drawings show that this detailed layout of the whole site was part of the original scheme.

The pub has two storeys with basement. Single-storey wings containing lavatories extend to the east and west and a brick wall connects to a block with barrel store and outside lavatories angled north-east to face onto Thimblemill Road. At ground floor level are a central, public bar with a smoking room to its west and a further bar to the east. A central, service area serves all three. The landlord's flat is at first floor level and approached from an internal staircase at the west and an external staircase at the east end.

EXTERIOR: the northern, road, front is symmetrical with a central, two-storey block which has an E-shaped arrangement with a central, single-storey porch wing and taller, projecting wings at either side. The wings have angled bays to the ground floor, with chamfered, stone surrounds including mullions and a transom. At first floor level are four-light mullioned windows. The central, spinal range has a lower ridge and three hipped dormer windows to the first floor, each with two casement lights. At ground floor level the central, square porch has a parapet and four-centred doorway with painted stone surround and panelled doors. To either side are four-light and two-light mullioned and transomed windows and a doorway with stone surround, that to the right leading to a lobby and staircase to the landlord's flat and that to the left now blocked. Four brick chimneystacks, to full height, are positioned at far right and left, and to north of the ridge. To far right and left the single-storey wings have original double doors with four-centred stone surrounds and beyond these are windows with timber surrounds and brick soldier courses to their sills and lintels. At far left, the bottle store has a round-arched central double door and a two light dormer above with hipped roof.

The south, rear front is largely masked at ground floor level by the later function room at its centre. To the left, the original single-storey lobby which connected the smoking room with the garden survives, but its openings have been blocked. At first floor level there is a series of two and three-light windows with wooden surrounds and metal-framed casements. The projecting lobby at left supports a balcony which is accessed from the landlord's flat.

The terrace is paved with stone slabs and to the south of this is a wall of c. 4 metres height of coursed stone rubble. It is battered in profile and has a series of square buttresses set at regular intervals. At right is a set of steps which lead up to the level of the bowling green. The wall turns at an angle at its west end and continues to the north east.

INTERIOR: the public bar is entered from the porch at the centre of the north front. It has fixed benches with moulded bench ends and heating pipes beneath, along the window wall. The bar front is matchboarded and appears original. Shelving beneath the bar also appears original, although altered in its configuration. The bar back retains original boarding and chamfered beams. Cornicing, encased beams and original floorboards survive. The fireplace is now blocked and the former off-sales department has been converted to lavatories off the public bar and its external door to the north side has been blocked. The smoking room at west also retains its full complement of fixed benches around the walls, with bell pushes to the dado and moulded legs, bench ends and screens. Original heating pipes are set under the benches. The brick and tile fire surround has been overpainted. The bar counter, to the south-east corner, is later-C20. The east bar also retains similar original benches and a brick and tile fireplace and cornicing. The bar and bar back have been heavily altered and may be entirely of late-C20 date. The cellar has its original barrel drops and barrel stands and a spirit store with wooden screen and shelving. An electric dumb waiter and its engine are placed against the south wall.

The kitchen is positioned at first floor level and appears to have always been sited there, serviced by the dumbwaiter and eastern, external stairs. A pantry, with original slate slab and wooden shelves is placed across the first floor corridor on the north side. The landlord's flat is approached by a dogleg staircase with stick balusters and square newels with flat caps.

At the time of survey (August 2013) roof tiles from the south slope of the roof had been removed and there were signs of vandalism, including broken windows and disturbance of some of the internal fittings, including the bar structure and benches in the eastern ground floor bar.

THE BOWLING PAVILION: is single-storied and of variegated brick, laid in Flemish bond with a hipped roof of plain tiles. It has four, square, brick columns to its west front, facing towards the green and these have courses of tiling interspersed for decorative effect. Behind this the pavilion has a recessed seating area at centre with changing rooms to either side, that at south having a series of wooden lockers to its south wall and that to the north having a later sink stand in place of the original similar arrangement. Boards with coat hooks survive in both rooms. On the east front there are a urinal and a tool store. The hipped roof of the pavilion has been damaged by vandalism and the flat roof over the urinal and store had been removed at the time of survey (August 2013).

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**Map****National Grid Reference:** SP0165187036

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