Archaeological evaluation of Land at Upper Dean Street, Birmingham

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Contents

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Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken of land at Upper Dean Street, Birmingham (NGR SP 07243 86349). It was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting, whose client intends the conversion of the site into student accommodation with associated landscaping and parking. A planning application has been submitted for these works.

Previous archaeological works adjacent to the site had identified the presence of two former water courses known as Pudding Brook and Dirty Brook, along with osier pits which are depicted on a map of 1808. It was thought that there was a potential for the continuation of these deposits into the site.

Four trenches were excavated to locate the survival of osier pits or other archaeologically significant features. The trenches revealed a combination of backfilled cellarage of the 19th Century houses which occupied the site until the 1970s and considerable depths of modern made ground.

No archaeologically significant features were recorded and it is concluded that, the former watercourse and osier pits would have been destroyed by cellarage in the 19th Century.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken of land at Upper Dean Street, Birmingham (NGR SP 07243 86349). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, whose client intends the conversion of the site into student accommodation with associated landscaping and parking. A planning application has been submitted for these works to Birmingham City Council (reference 2014/09503/PA).

Osiers pits and an early watercourse had been recorded during an excavation of the adjacent Travel Lodge site and it was thought that there was a potential for the survival of similar deposits in the footprint of the development.

The project conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by CgMs Consulting (CgMs 2016) and approved by Birmingham City Council. The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a).

2 Aims

The aims of this evaluation were to:

- confirm the location of and to determine the date, form and function of the osier pits as mapped by Sherriff in 1808;
- identify, sample and analyse environmental and industrial residues in the osier pits which could provide information on the past environment and surrounding medieval and post-medieval industrial activity;
- identify and examine any archaeological features predating the 18th century maps of the area and sample these accordingly.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Timothy Cornah (BA (hons.), MSc), who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2006 and has been practicing archaeology since 2003, assisted by Graham Arnold (BA (hons.), MSc). The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA (hons.); MSc). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); PG Cert; MCIfA).

3.2 Documentary research

The archaeological background of the site is set out in the WSI and is repeated in Section 4 below.

3.3 List of sources consulted

Cartographic sources

- *1778 Plan of Birmingham (Thomas Hanson)*
- *1808 Sherriff Map*
- *1st edition 1887 Ordnance Survey Map 1:1,2500*
- *1905 Ordnance Survey Map 1:1,2500*
- *1937 Ordnance Survey Map 1:1,2500*
- *1952 Ordnance Survey Map 1:1,2500*

Documentary sources

Published and grey literature sources are listed in the bibliography.

3.4 Fieldwork strategy

Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th and 22nd September 2016. Four trenches, amounting to just over 108m² in area, were excavated over the site area of about 3620 m². The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2. Trench 1 was placed to test the westwards extension of osier pits recorded by Sherriff in 1808 and excavated by ULAS in 2009. This was planned to be excavated on a NE to SW alignment but was turned to run NW to SE due to obstructions on site. Trench 2 was to test a former courtyard area extending back from Pershore Street, Trench 3 to assess the impact of 19th century development and Trench 4 to test a courtyard area extending back from Upper Dean Street.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360º wheeled 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.

3.5 Structural analysis

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

3.6 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a reasonably high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Whilst the depth of the deposits and features observed did not allow their close inspection for health and safety reasons, none of these were considered important to fulfil the aims of the project as stated above. Trench 1, which was located to test the presence of the potential osier pits was re-aligned from the original planned location due to the presence of a building but it is thought that a sufficient area was covered to establish their survival or absence.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The site is located close to the centre of Birmingham on the junction of Pershore and Upper Dean Street. The site is broadly level with Pershore Street at around 110m AOD, though slopes slightly down to its south-east corner. The centre of Birmingham is located on a ridge of Keuper Sandstone, with the drift geology being largely sand and gravel. Areas of alluvial deposits have been recorded associated with River Rea to the north of the site. Recent geotechnical investigations across the site recorded natural geological deposits consisting of sand and gravels at a depth of between 1.8 and 4.9m (CgMs 2016).

The archaeological context the of area related firstly to a watercourse shown on the earliest mapping to the eastern side of the site which fed the Manorial Moat and the Parsonage Moat during the medieval era. This was labelled as Pudding Brook the 18th century and a further parallel Dirty Brook is shown in 1808. Dirty Brook ran in the opposite direction towards the south and is likely to have been used for carrying dirty water away from the town. Prior to 1778, the site is shown in agricultural use (CgMs 2016).

The presence of these water courses attracted industries which required water, notably tanning, hemp retting, willow processing and basket making. The 1808 map shows both brooks, as well as osier pits and a skin yard probably associated with tanning close to the site. Excavation at the Travel Lodge on the eastern side of the site, extending into its eastern corner, revealed that the remains of Pudding Brook had been erased by 19th century cellaring, whilst those of the Dirty Brook were present at a depth of 1m below the current ground surface at the southern end of the site (Figure 5). Osier pits on broadly the same position as those shown on the 1808 mapping were also present. These osiers pits were located within gardens, as was much of the rest of the site at

this time (CgMs 2016). Excavations at the former ice rink to the south of the site confirmed the presence of the Dirty Brook, though at this point was located within a brick culvert. Deposits relating to an earlier channel were also present and are again likely to relate to the Dirty Brook (WA2016).

The mapping shows the site having been developed by 1887. A boot and shoe works, strap saddle and harness works and a toy manufactory were present, along with numerous smaller buildings, likely to be residential. The site continued to be redeveloped until the modern era.

4.2 Current land-use

Two sets of buildings remained on the site. Those on its northern border were disused, whilst those on its southern side remained in commercial use. The remainder of the site was used as a car park.

5 Results

5.1 Structural analysis

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

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

Deposits (122, 210 and 305) were of natural origin and consisted of yellow orange sand and gravels. These were present at a depth of between 2.5 and 3m from the present-day ground surface.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Post-medieval deposits

Within Trench 1, a single linear feature [117] (Plate 3) aligned north-east to south-west was present that was cut by later walls (116 and 112) and possibly also by wall (118). The depth of this feature was about 1.5m. This had four fills (113 to 116), the lowest of which, a blueish grey deposit is likely to consist of clay. The alignment of this feature was parallel to a post-medieval feature recorded within the excavation area under the Travel Lodge site to the east. The feature recorded within the Travel Lodge site was no deeper the about 1.30m below the modern surface whereas [117] extends to beyond 2.5m below the modern ground surface. They are therefore unlikely to be related. Its fills and profile suggests that it is not related to the osier pits within the adjacent excavation.

The majority of the walls present within Trench 1 appear to relate to cellarage with walls (105 and 108) (Plate 4) forming a staircase into the cellar. The areas between walls (110) and (112) were rubble-filled, consistent with a cellar backfill. Wall (118) also contained a brick arch on its south-west side (Plate 5) which was later blocked. This is likely to have led into an area in the north-west corner of the trench next to wall (121), which was removed during excavation. These walls are likely to have been the cellars of the 19th Century houses which stood on the site until the 1970s. A further culvert was visible at the northern end of Trench 1 (Plate 6). The walls recorded within this trench are plotted in relation to the 1887 mapping on (Figure 4).

Within Trench 2 deposits (203, 204 and 207) consisted of a large dump ground makeup layers, again likely to relate to the 19th century development of the area. A brick well (206) (Plate 8) extended to the depth of a brick culvert (208) (Plate 9) which ran in a north-east to south-west direction. A further small wall (205) was present that is likely to have been part of a manhole. A quern stone was recovered from the fill of the backfill of well (206) (Plate 10).

Trench 3 contained a broadly similar layer to those in Trench 2 (302) (Plate 11). This also contained a brick culvert (303) (Plate 12) and manhole cover (304). It is possible that the culvert related to a series of small buildings depicted in the same area on the 1887 mapping (Figure 4) which are likely to have been outdoor toilets.

Trench 4 contained two walls likely also to be of 19th century date (404 and 405) with rubble deposits (402 and 403) either side (Plate 13). A deeper sondage in the south-west corner of the trench contained deposits (407 and 408) (Plate 14), the latter of which contained pieces of softwood, suggesting a likely date within the second half of the 19th century. These deposits were themselves cut by a ceramic drain. Wall (404) continued to a depth of at least 2.70m below the ground surface and is likely to have been the rear wall of a building shown on the 1887 mapping (Figure 4) whilst wall (405) remained to a depth of two courses only.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Modern deposits

A number of features within the trenches are likely to relate to the use of the site within the 20th century, such as a concrete pad within Trench 1 along with a concrete surface within the section in the same trench. A number of ceramic drainage pipes are also likely to be 20th century in date.

Rubble deposits resulting from the levelling of the site in the later 20th century were present (101, 201, 301 and 401), these were in turn overlain by a loose gravel and crushed tarmac car park surface (100, 200, 300 and 400).

5.2 Artefact analysis

No artefacts predating the modern and late post-medieval eras were present. These were not therefore retained for analysis.

5.3 Environmental analysis

No deposits suitable for environmental analysis were present on the site.

6 Synthesis

Previous archaeological works and studies of the historic mapping within the vicinity of the site suggested the presence of a watercourse known as Pudding Brook to the immediate east of the site that is thought to have fed the two moated sites to the north in the medieval period. Further to this, the parallel Dirty Brook was added in the 18th century which took dirty water away from the growing town centre. Various industries took advantage of these water courses and became established within the area. Sherriff's map of 1808 shows osier beds within the site and the presence of these was confirmed by excavations under the adjacent Travel Lodge. This and a further excavation on the former ice rink site to the south of the site also confirmed the presence of the Dirty Brook (WA 2016).

No remains relating to osier beds or watercourses were present within Trench 1 which was placed to establish their survival. Only one feature was recorded within the trench that maintained an alignment of features within the Travel Lodge excavation site. However a discrepancy within the depth of deposits between the two areas suggests that they are unrelated.

The remainder of the deposits and features present related to the development of the area depicted on historic mapping between the period of 1808 and 1888. The cellarage recorded within Trench 1 was likely to belong to this period and clearly truncated the natural deposits. Further such cellarage was recorded within Trench 4 and significant modern ground makeup layers were present within Trenches 2 and 3. The culverts recorded within both Trenches 1 and 2 were consistent drainage of the area in the 19th century and it is possible that they linked ultimately with the Dirty Brook, which itself is known to have been culverted to the south.

7 Significance

The aim of the project was to identify and characterise deposits relating to previously recognised osier pits along with any features predating the 18th century mapping. Given that no such features were present, the archaeological significance of deposits within the site is minimal.

8 The impact of the development

The impact of the development will be primarily upon deposits and features relating to the 19th century development of the site. Given the minimal archaeological significance of these features, the impact of the construction will be low.

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.

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No archaeologically significant features were recorded and it is concluded that, the former watercourse and Osier pits would have been destroyed by cellarage in the 19th Century.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Cathy Patrick of CgMs Consulting and Ross Brazier of Birmingham City Council.

11 Bibliography

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CIfA 2014b *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials,* Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, http://www.archaeologists.net/codes/ifa

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WA 2016 *Archaeological investigations at Pershore Street*, Worcestershire Archaeology report 2307.

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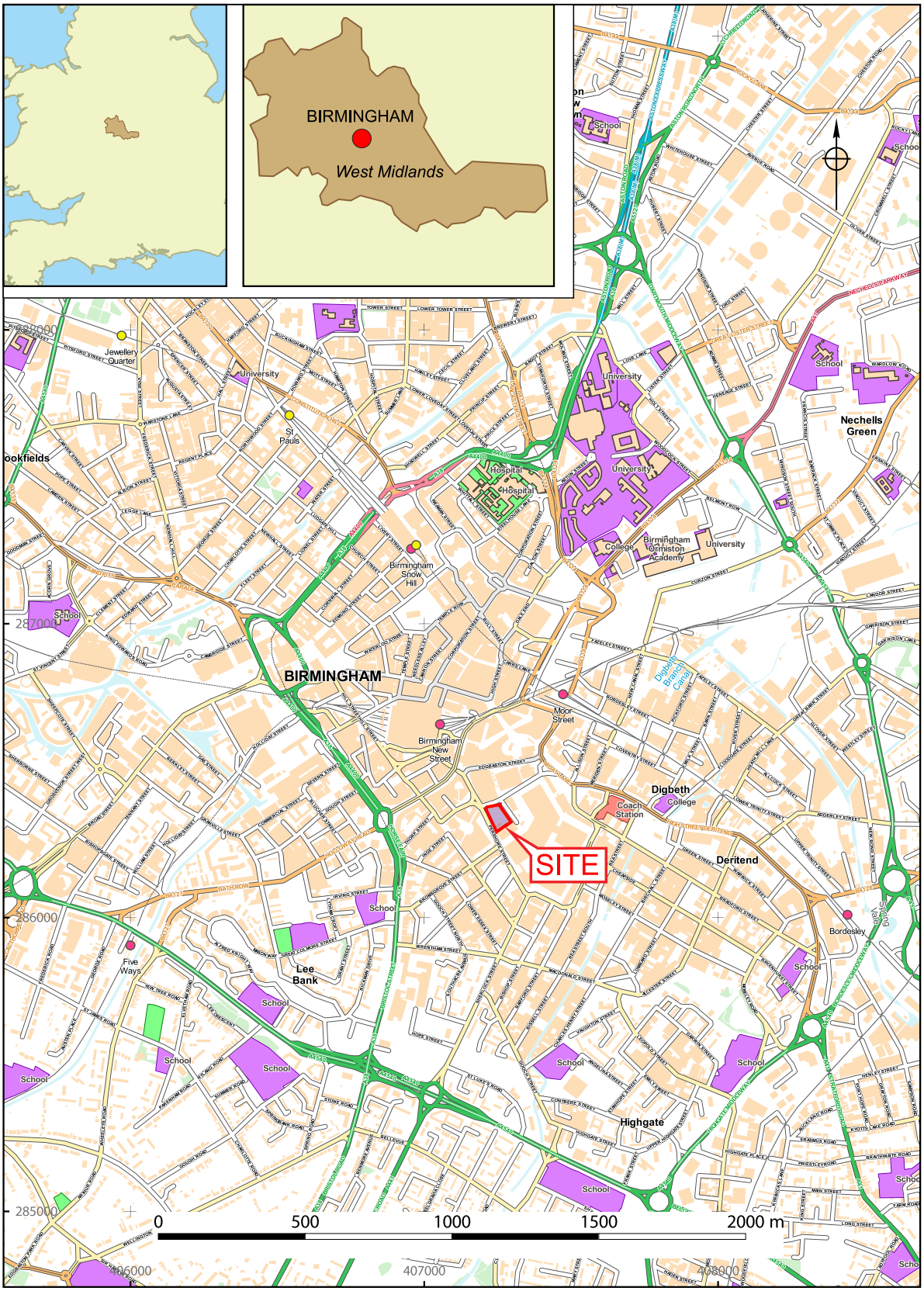
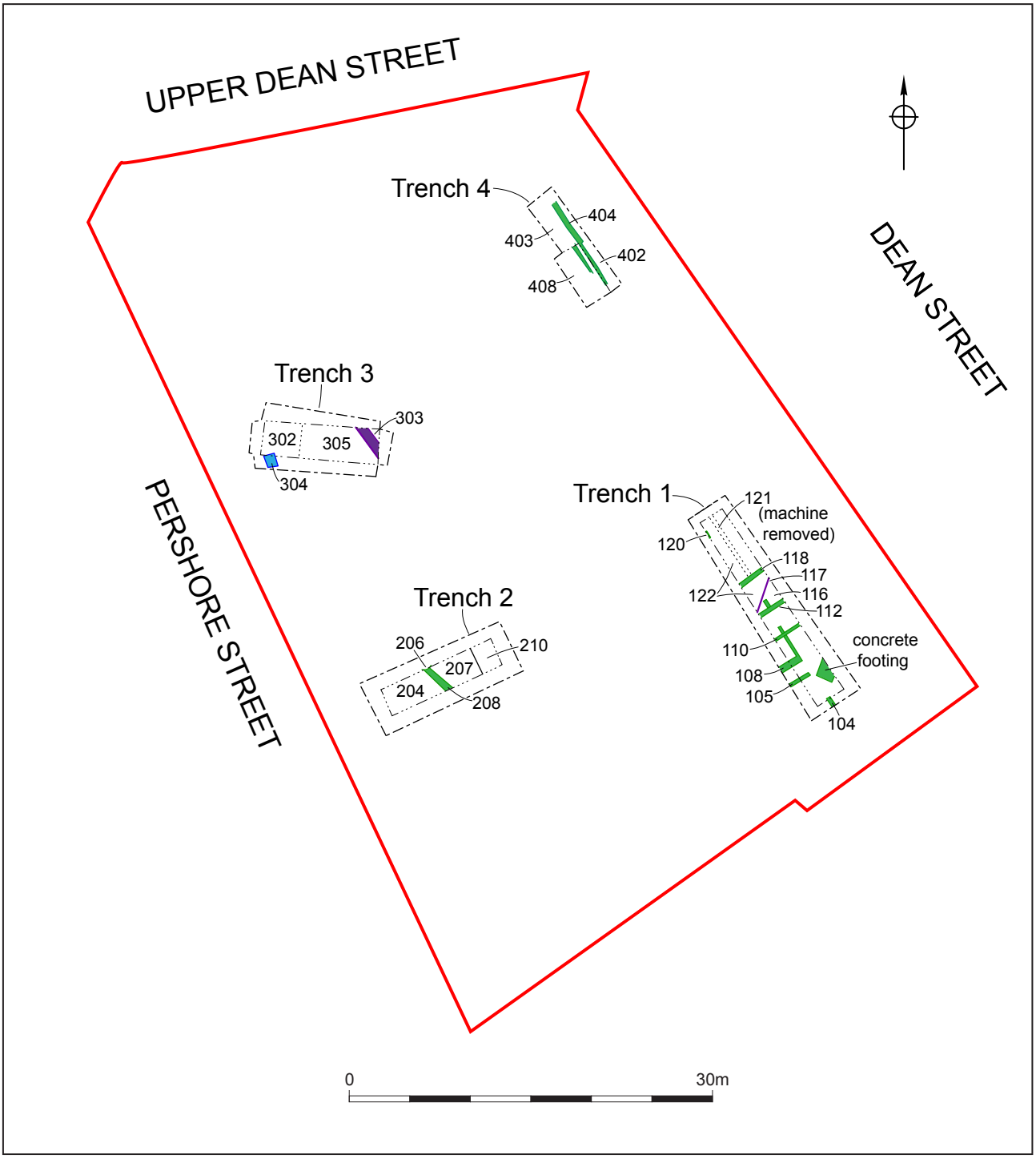
Figures



Location of the site *Figure 1*

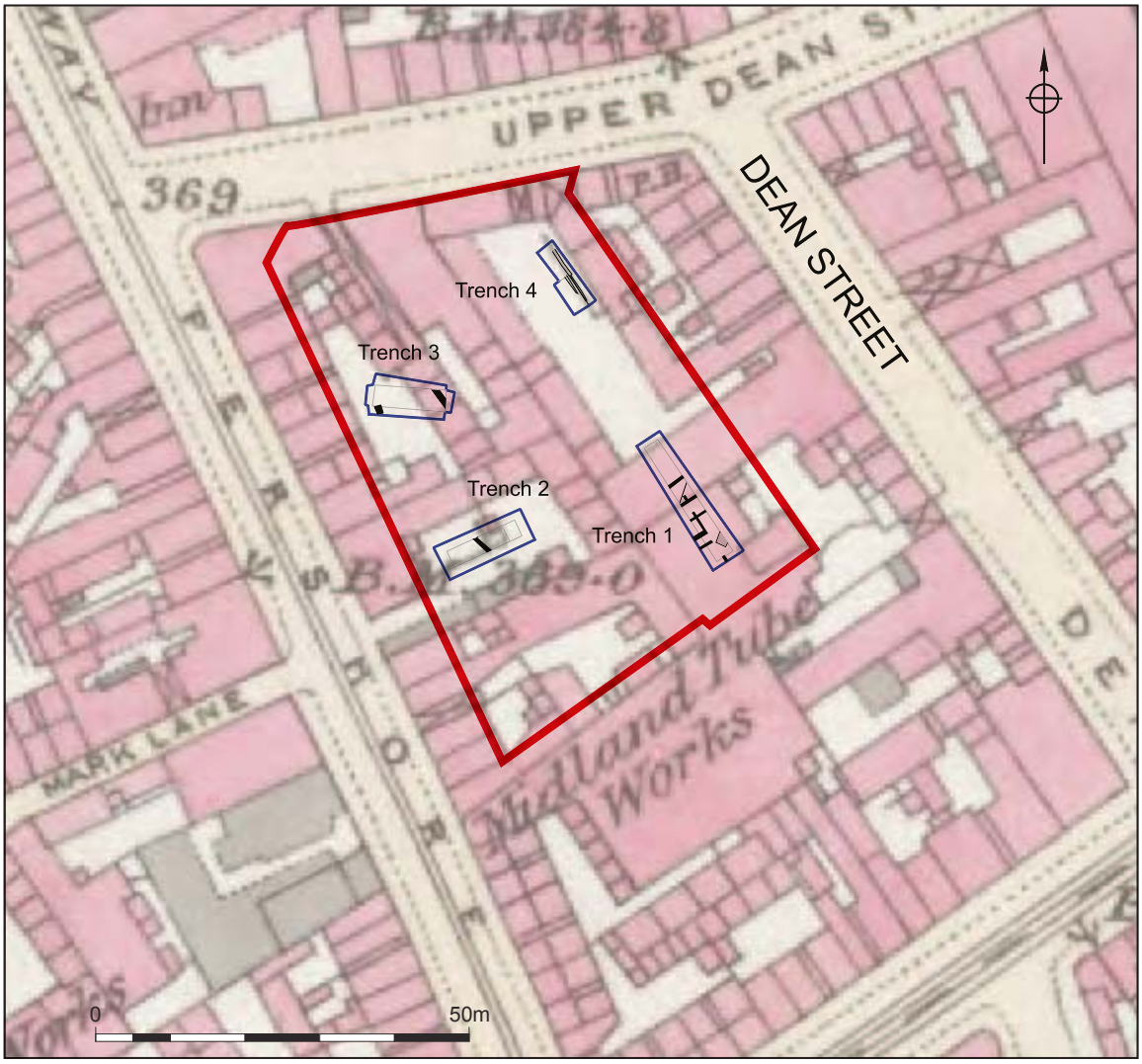
Trench location plan

Figure 2

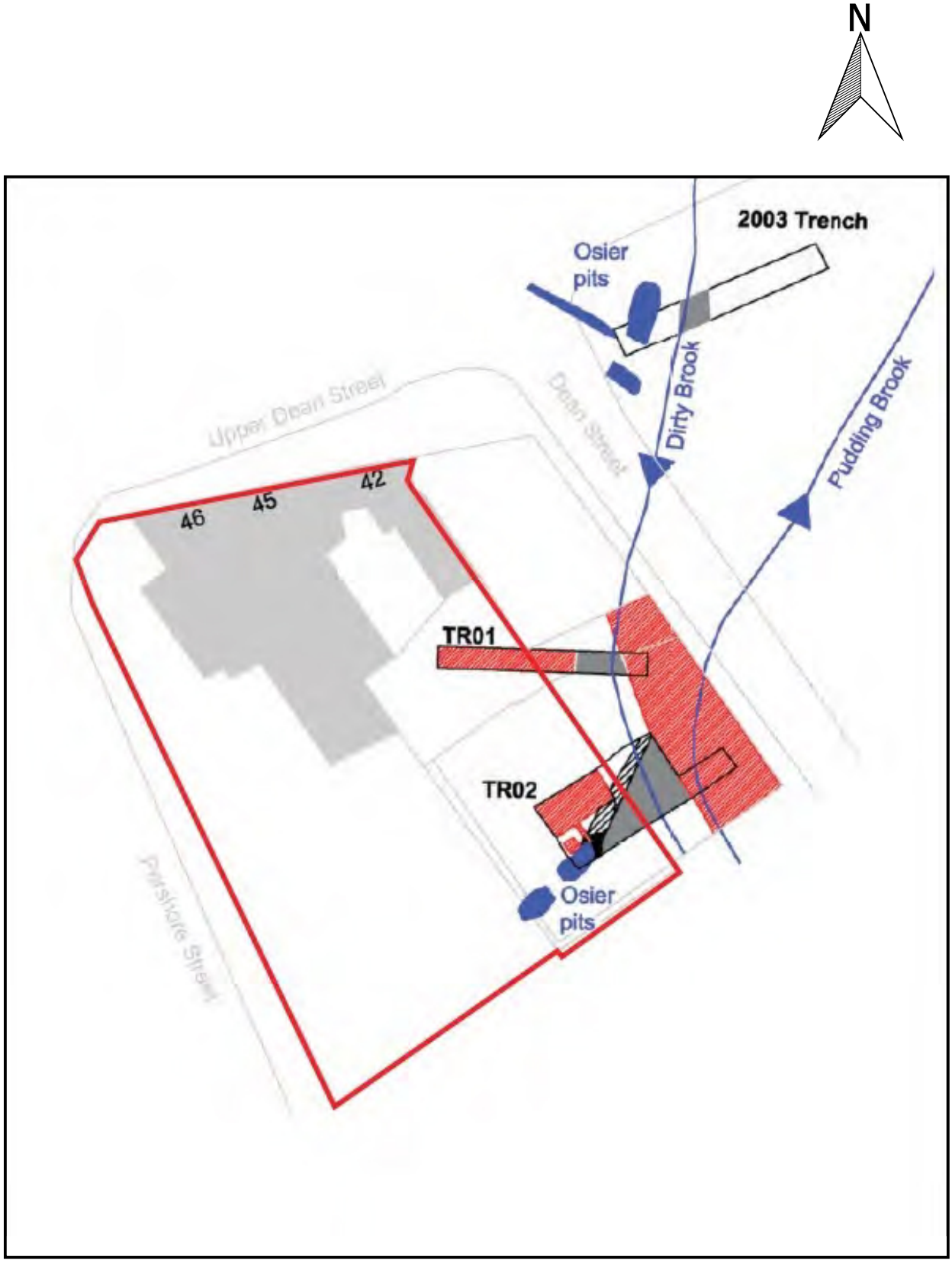


Plan of trenches 1 to 4

Figure 3



Extract of 1st ediion OS showing approximate location of trenches *Figure 4*



Osier pits and brooks from previous site work (from CgMs WSI) *Figure 5*

Plates

Plate 1 The site looking south-east

Plate 2 Trench 1, looking north-west

Plate 3 Feature [117], looking north-east

Plate 4 Walls (105) and (108), looking south-west

Plate 5 Wall (118), looking north-west

Plate 6 Wall (112) with culvert partially visible and natural deposit (122) in the base, looking south

Plate 7 Trench 2, looking south-west

Plate 8 Trench 2, looking south-west

Plate 9 Trench 2 culvert (208), looking south-east

Plate 10 Quern recovered from within manhole (206), scale 1m

Plate 11 Trench 3, looking north-east with natural deposit (305) within the base

Plate 12 Trench 3 culvert (303), looking north-west

Plate 13 Trench 4 walls (404 and 405), looking north-west

Plate 14 Trench 4 sondage with deposit (408) visible within the base, looking south-east

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 20m Width: 5m Depth: 2.50m

Orientation: NW-SE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Layer	Tarmac and loose chippings surface	0-0.50m
101	Layer	Hard-core dump deposit	0.50-1m
102	Layer	Modern dump backfill layer containing concrete and brick rubble	
103	Layer	Compact greyish clay, abutting wall 104 and below deposit 102	
104	Wall	NW-SE aligned brick wall, possibly part of a cellar	
105	Wall	NE-SW aligned brick wall, likely to be part of a staircase leading into a cellar area along with wall 108	
106	Layer	Yellow grey gravel deposit next to wall 110. Possibly the same as 122	
107	Layer	Grey brown rubble backfill between walls 110 and 108	
108	Wall	NE-SW aligned brick wall, likely to be part of a staircase leading into a cellar area along with wall 105	
109	Wall	NW-SE aligned brick wall, possibly part of a cellar	
110	Layer	NE-SW aligned brick wall, likely to be part of a cellar	
111	Wall	NE-SW aligned brick wall, likely to be part of a cellar	c1-2.5m plus
112	Wall	NE-SW aligned brick wall, likely to be part of a cellar	c1-2.5m plus
113	Fill	Loose rubble fil of 117	c1-1.8m

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
114	Fill	Dark brownish grey silty clay fill of 117	c1.8- 2m
115	Fill	Tip of red sandstone fragments within 117	c2-2.3m
116	Fill	Dark grey brown lowest known fill of 117, probably contained a high clay content	c2-2.5m plus
117	Cut	Broadly N-S aligned cut, truncated on its eastern side by later walls	c1-2.5m plus
118	Wall	NE-SW aligned brick wall with arch, likely to be part of a cellar	
119	Layer	Loose rubble and grey brown deposit, cellar backfill	c1-2.2m
120	Structure	NE-SW aligned brick wall with arch, likely to be part of a cellar	c1.5-2m
121	Wall	NW-SE aligned brick wall, possibly part of a cellar, removed during excavation	
122	Layer	Reddish orange sands and gravels, natural.	2.5m plus

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 13m Width: 5m Depth: 2.50m

Orientation: NE-SW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Layer	Tarmac and loose chippings surface	0-0.2m
201	Layer	Hard-core dump deposit containing modern material such as tarmac and concrete	0.2-0.75m
202	Layer	Ground makeup layer consisting of a black grey clinker deposit	0.75-1.2m
203	Layer	Series of thin dump layers including orange clay, ash and clinker, ground makeup layer	1.15-1.65m
204	Layer	Yellowish brown and blackish grey deposits,	1.65-2.50m

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
		ground makeup layer	
205	Structure	Brick manhole at the N-E end of the trench	
206	Structure	Brick manhole or well	c1.2-2.4m
207	Layer	Mixed dark grey blue deposit below 204	
208	Structure	Broadlly E-W aligned brick culvert, below 207	c2.5m plus
209	Layer	Yellow grey deposit below 207, possibly the weathred top of 210	c2.5m
210	Layer	Reddish orange sandy gravels, natural	C2.6m plus

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 11m Width: 5m Depth: 2.50m

Orientation: E-W

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Layer	Tarmac and loose chippings surface	0-0.15m
301	Layer	Hardcore dump deposit	0.15-0.60m
302	Layer	Ground makeup layer consisting of a black grey clinker deposit, ground makeup layer	c0.60-1.90m
303	Structure	NW-SE aligned brick culvert	
304	Structure	Brick manhole structure	c1.2-2.50m
305	Layer	Orangey yellow sand and gravel, natural	c2.5m plus

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 10m Width: 2m Depth: 0.85-2.70m

Orientation: NW-SE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
400	Layer	Tarmac and loose chippings surface	0-0.10m
401	Layer	Hard-core dump deposit containing modern material such as tarmac and concrete	0.10-0.40m
402	Layer	Loose brick rubble backfill of cellarage on the east side of wall 404	0.40-0.45m plus
403	Layer	Cobble brick and ash fill of likely cellarage to the west side of wall 404, extends below wall 405	0.40-c1.20m
404	Wall	NW-SE aligned brick cellar wall	0.85-c2.70m plus
405	Wall	NW-SE aligned brick wall, only two courses deep	0.85-1.05m
406	Layer	Modern brick and ceramic drainage feature in south corner of the sondage	
407	Layer	Orangey brown clay silt within mortar, brick and ash inclusions	c1.2-2.5m
408	Layer	Compact reddish clay with inclusions of softwood pieces, brick fragments and charcoal.	c2.5-2.7m plus

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

1 Field progress reports AS2

192 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 Museum and Art Gallery
Chamberlain Square
Birmingham
B3 3DH

Tel: 0121 3032834