

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF AT  
WEDNESFIELD URBAN SQUARE,  
WEDNESFIELD,  
WOLVERHAMPTON

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With a contribution by Dennis Williams

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Project 2841  
Report 1669  
EBL 829



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# **Archaeological watching brief at Wednesfield Urban Square, Wednesfield, Wolverhampton**

**Justin Hughes and Tom Vaughan**

**With a contribution by Dennis Williams**

## **Part 1 Project summary**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Rookery Street/Well Lane, Wednesfield, Wolverhampton (NGR: SJ 9430 0010). It was undertaken on behalf of Wolverhampton City Council during construction of an urban square and footpath link between Bentley Bridge and High Street, Wednesfield for which a planning application has been submitted.

Four trenches were monitored, yielding post-medieval artefacts and modern deposits, the remains of modern domestic and industrial structures. The remains of modern wall boundaries and ditches were recorded but stratified post-medieval deposits were not encountered. However, residual fragments of 17<sup>th</sup> century pottery, assumed to have been manufactured in the Wednesbury potteries, were found in later deposits.

The project followed a number of previous site investigations which had revealed 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century pits/postholes, 17<sup>th</sup> century boundary ditches and iron working, and 19<sup>th</sup> century cellars along Rookery Street.

The current watching brief did not reveal any further in situ remains of medieval or post-medieval date. However, the alignments of the modern ditches and brick buildings exposed respect Rookery Street's frontage and confirm that, along with earlier property boundaries recorded during previous excavations in Areas A and B, this area of Wednesfield took its present shape during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



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## Part 2 Detailed report

### 1. Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Rookery Street/Well Lane, Wednesfield, Wolverhampton (NGR: SJ 9430 0010; Fig 1), on behalf of the client, Wolverhampton City Council. The client has received planning permission to construct an urban square and footpath link between Bentley Bridge and High Street, Wednesfield, subject to archaeological monitoring (reference 05/1091/DW).

The watching brief was recommended as a result of previous site works (Cherrington and Coates 2004; Hughes 2007; Rogers and Robson-Glyde 2006) across the proposed development area and was concentrated on Area A (Figs 2 and 3).

#### 1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008a).

The project also conforms to a brief prepared by Wolverhampton City Council (Shaw 2008) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2008).

#### 1.3 Aims

The aims of the investigations 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 an appropriate treatment, which may then be integrated with the proposed development programme.

### 2. Methods

#### 2.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Black Country Sites and Monuments Record (BCSMR). In addition to the sources listed in the bibliography the following were also consulted:

##### *Cartographic sources*

- 1842 Wednesfield tithe survey and award (Wolverhampton Archives ref. MAP/101/a)
- 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1887 Ordnance Survey map, Wednesfield sheet, 25": 1 mile
- 1902 Ordnance Survey map, Wednesfield sheet, 25":1 mile
- 1919 Ordnance Survey map, Wednesfield sheet 25":1 mile
- 1938 Ordnance Survey map, Wednesfield sheet, 25":1 mile
- 1953 Ordnance Survey map, Wednesfield sheet, 1:2,500

## 2.2 **Fieldwork methodology**

### 2.2.1 **Fieldwork strategy**

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2008).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 6 and 27 May 2008. The site reference number and site code is EBL 829.

In the initial stages of the monitoring of groundworks in Area A, four trenches were excavated to provide a new access road between Well Lane and Hall Street and for two pathways (Figs 2 and 3). At a later stage the landscaping for the main routes through to the 'urban square' required further removal of modern deposits above a depth deemed to have impact on archaeological deposits.

Although groundworks were undertaken in Area B, they were not made available for monitoring.

### 2.2.2 **Structural analysis**

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

## 2.3 **Artefact methodology, by Dennis Williams**

### 2.3.1 **Artefact recovery policy**

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 4).

### 2.3.2 **Method of analysis**

All hand retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. All information was recorded on *pro forma* sheets.

The pottery and ceramic building materials were examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

## 2.4 **Environmental archaeology methodology**

### 2.4.1 **Sampling policy**

The environmental sampling strategy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 4). In the event, no deposits were identified during the fieldwork which were considered suitable for environmental analysis.

## 2.5 **The methods in retrospect**

Having undertaken the project the following comments may be made with regard to the methods adopted.

The archive prepared as a result of the archaeological monitoring within Areas A and C is a reliable record. However, Area B was not made available for monitoring.



Thus it is considered that for Areas A and C the methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. However for Area B, the aims of the watching brief cannot be considered to have been met.

### 3. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The archaeological background to this site has previously been described in a report prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Cherrington and Coates 2004, Section 4.1). The following is a summary derived from Rogers and Robson-Glyde (2006, 5-6).

The site is located to the south-west of the medieval village of Wednesfield and falls within the historic core of the settlement. The placename suggests a Saxon origin as a field or open ground of the Anglo-Saxon god *Woden* (the equivalent of the Norse *Odin*) and this name is first recorded at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. This may imply the existence of a shrine to the god somewhere in this area. Settlement at Wednesfield is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086.

Medieval Wednesfield seems to have been a small village surrounded by farms, some of them moated, and four open fields. The village lay in the parish of St Peter's, Wolverhampton and Wolverhampton Deanery Manor.

Yates' County Map of Staffordshire of 1775 shows buildings along Rookery Street at this time.

Industrialisation arrived later in Wednesfield than other Black Country towns, its open fields lasting into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was noted for its cottage industries such as key making (Chubb Locks still operate a plant here) and trap making. In 1795 the Wyrley and Essington Canal (BCSMR 6939) was built, passing through the town to the west of the High Street. This was a narrow canal principally used to carry coal from mines in the Wyrley and Essington area to Wolverhampton.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century large-scale manufacturing industry had arrived in the south part of Wednesfield. An ironworks and a manure and acid works are shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 and a chocolate factory on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of 1902.

Despite the intrusion of large-scale manufacturing, small-scale industry survived well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kelly's Directory of 1896 lists fourteen key makers and two lock makers in Rookery Street alone, as well as ten key makers in Hall Street.

The tithe map of 1842 shows Wednesfield as a large village. There are houses fronting onto Rookery Street with narrow plots extending back through the subject site although there is also a building on the frontage of Well Lane.

The 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 shows further buildings along Well Lane, and a public house on the corner of Well Lane and Rookery Street. A smithy is shown immediately south of the site, fronting onto Well Lane, although this is not marked on the 1902 edition. On the 1919 edition, several small outhouses have been constructed to the rear of the street frontages.

The 1971 OS map shows many of the terraced houses along Well Street replaced with the semi-detached houses that still stand. In the 1970s all the houses in this block were demolished including the public house on the corner which was re-shaped to allow easier turning between Rookery Street and Well Lane.

Close to the site (1-5, Church Street) is a mid 18<sup>th</sup> century house (BCSMR 5878) and 'The Pyle Cock' public house (BCSMR 13234) built in 1867. The 'Dog and Partridge' Inn

(BCSMR 445) a late 16<sup>th</sup> century building is the earliest known structure still standing in Wednesfield.

An evaluation undertaken in 2003 within Area A identified several pits and postholes cut into the natural sand. One pit contained 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century pottery. A buried soil contained later medieval pottery. Two pits were also recorded cutting post-medieval deposits overlying the natural (Cherrington and Coates 2004).

In 2006 the Service opened an excavation area around the aforementioned features. One of the pits identified in the evaluation was re-excavated and recorded. An additional three small pits were also identified. One pit contained 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery, while all were considered to be broadly contemporary. A large pit or ditch terminus was excavated, which continued beyond the southern limit of the excavated area. This was almost 2m deep, contained five fills, including an organic layer at the base, and 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery. Pollen analysis indicated that the immediate landscape within which the feature lay comprised meadowland, pasture, and hedgebanks. Several pits containing modern material including bricks and plastic were also recorded (Rogers and Robson-Glyde 2006).

In 2007 the Service undertook an evaluation and excavation of Area B. In the eastern half of the area, 19<sup>th</sup> century cellaring and 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century demolition debris predominated. Toward the west side two parallel north-south aligned ditches were observed. The features were considered to be contemporary and conjectured to form a boundary and drainage facility between two properties. One contained a near complete tyg cup, datable to late 16<sup>th</sup>/early 17<sup>th</sup> century, while both contained waste iron smithing slag fragments from hearth bases, indicating industrial activity in the immediate vicinity in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (Hughes 2007).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Structural analysis

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

#### 4.1.1 Phase 1 Natural deposits

There is a natural break of slope running northwest to southeast (from Hall Street to the junction of Rookery Street and Well Lane). Towards this junction, where modern overburden is up to 1.20m below the pre-development ground surface, the natural soils were characterised by friable orange brown clay silt with moderate rounded and angular pebbles. As the natural ground rises to the northwest these clay silts are interspersed with sandy silts containing sparser quantities of stone and pebbles (11118).

#### 4.1.2 Phase 2 Post-medieval deposits

No deposits pre-dating the post-medieval period were recorded.

The area monitored largely consisted of disturbed deposits and moderate amounts of rubble and comprised a mixed composition of made ground with loose dark grey clay silt containing cinders and rubble. However, a number of modern deposits were found to contain residual material of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century date (Section 4.2 below).

#### 4.1.3 Phase 3 Modern deposits

Groundworks for the development largely exposed modern layers of loose dark grey silty clay, below turf, overlying debris from former buildings and subsoils of loose orange brown sandy silt. Apart from truncated service trenches (see Appendix 1) remains of brick walls were revealed in the section baulks created for the laying of new footpaths. These comprised a double skinned brick wall (Plates 1 and 2) 1.60m wide, observed in SW section of Trench 10 (10005) which continued into the southeast section of Trench 11 (11114). A heavily truncated modern pit (10007) containing dumped material was also observed in Trench 10 but was not excavated.

The remains of a modern building consisting of double skinned brick walls (11113 and 11115, Plate 3) both aligned east-west with respective dimensions of 4.60 by 1.00m and 3.30 by 0.30m were present in the northern half of Trench 11.

A brick lined cistern (11127, Plate 4) with a lime render (11129) and backfilled with a compact, mid brown grey sandy silt (11128) contained a 19<sup>th</sup> century cider jar and stone cog wheel (Plates 6 and 7).

A modern boundary ditch (11119, Plate 5) was also recorded to the immediate south of the cistern, along with a narrower truncated ditch (11121) to the immediate west.

#### 4.2 Artefact analysis, by Dennis Williams

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

##### 4.2.1 The artefact assemblage

Pottery accounted for all the artefactual assemblage from this site, except for one stone object, which was photographed on site, but not recovered for further examination. 40 sherds of pottery, with a total weight of 521g, were all retrieved from unstratified deposits (Table 1). Standards of preservation were generally good, but various pieces had been exposed to burning, or contact with rusting metal, suggesting that they had been disposed of with other refuse. Although most of the sherds were small, over 40% were from bases and rims, representing various forms including bowls, cups, dishes, jars, plates and platters. There was also one almost complete jar.

Material	Type	Total	Weight (g)
Pottery	Post-medieval	15	4881
Pottery	Post-medieval/modern	26	240
Totals:		40	5121

*Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage*

##### **Pottery**

The pottery finds are quantified by fabric in Table 2. All dated from the post-medieval or modern periods, with no clear evidence of any imported material. There were two examples of red wares bearing good quality black glazes on both internal and external surfaces, which dated from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One was a finely-crafted rim sherd from a handled jar with a brownish-red fabric, the other a jar base with a dark purplish-red fabric. These fabric types also constituted the earliest datable material from the previous excavations in Areas A and B at this site (Crawford 2006, Crawford and Jacobs 2007).

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Fabric no.	Fabric name	Total	Weight (g)
78	Post-medieval red wares	10	157
81	Stonewares	4	4674
83	Porcelain	4	16
85	Modern china	22	254
Totals:		40	5101

*Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric*

A single red ware (fabric 78) sherd, with trailed slip decoration, and dark brown glaze on inner and outer surfaces, had a much coarser fabric, from a wider 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century date range. A number of other red wares, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century in date, were also present, but these had functional, black glazing on inner surfaces only (the purpose of this being to seal the surfaces of their very coarse earthenware fabrics).

A notable pottery find was a two-gallon stoneware jar (Plate 6), which had suffered only minor damage in the form of two chips to the rim. Probably a container for cider, this had a single strap handle on its shoulder. The form and style of glazing are typical of 19<sup>th</sup> century jars, although it had no maker's marking.

The remainder of the assemblage was unremarkable insofar as it mainly comprised mass-produced, glazed stonewares (81) and china (85), 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century in date. There was, however, one sherd of fine white porcelain (fabric 83), with a sprigged, thistle decoration, painted in pale blue, which probably dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were also three other very small sherds with fabrics broadly similar to this, but their basic styles of gilded decoration suggested they were from later bone china vessels.

The two handled vessel was probably manufactured at Wednesbury. The fabric and glaze is similar to the two tyg vessels recovered during excavations within Area B. Two similar pieces were found at Sandwell Priory (Hodder 1991) and at a kiln site at the Market Place in Wednesbury (Hodder 1992).

### **Stone**

The single stone object was photographed on site (Plate 7). This was approximately 630mm in diameter, with a thickness slightly less than this,. A corroded iron cog insert at one end of a central hole held the remains of a wooden pole shaft. It was unclear whether it had been used as a grindstone, since the cylindrical surface was very uneven, suggesting it may have been a weight, rather than part of a rotary mechanism.

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## 5. **Synthesis and conclusions**

No deposits, layers, structures or features pre-dating the modern period were identified during the watching brief. There was no in situ evidence for a continuation of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century activity, the 17<sup>th</sup> century industrial activity or property boundaries previously identified. However, although the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, and later, finds assemblage was small and unstratified, it provided a reasonable selection of domestic pottery for these periods.

The cistern (11127, Plate 4) was interpreted as a storage tank for fuel and was probably in use from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the early 1960s, when associated domestic and industrial buildings were demolished for landscaping.

The double skin brick walls (10005, 11113 and 11115; Plates 3) may have been the remains of properties facing onto Rookery Street in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but the narrowness of the observed sections did not allow for a confident interpretation.

The alignments of the modern ditches and brick buildings respect Rookery Street's frontage and confirm that, along with earlier property boundaries recorded during previous excavations in Areas A and B, this area of Wednesfield took its present shape in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

## 6. **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.

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*The current watching brief did not reveal any further in situ remains of medieval or post-medieval date. However, the alignments of the modern ditches and brick buildings exposed respect Rookery Street's frontage and confirm that, along with earlier property boundaries recorded during previous excavations in Areas A and B, this area of Wednesfield took its present shape during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.*

## 7. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Peter Collings, Rob Freewood (Wolverhampton City Council), and Mike Shaw (Black County Archaeologist, Wolverhampton City Council).

8. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Justin Hughes. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan. Fieldwork was undertaken by Justin Hughes and Adam Lee, finds analysis by Dennis Williams, and illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

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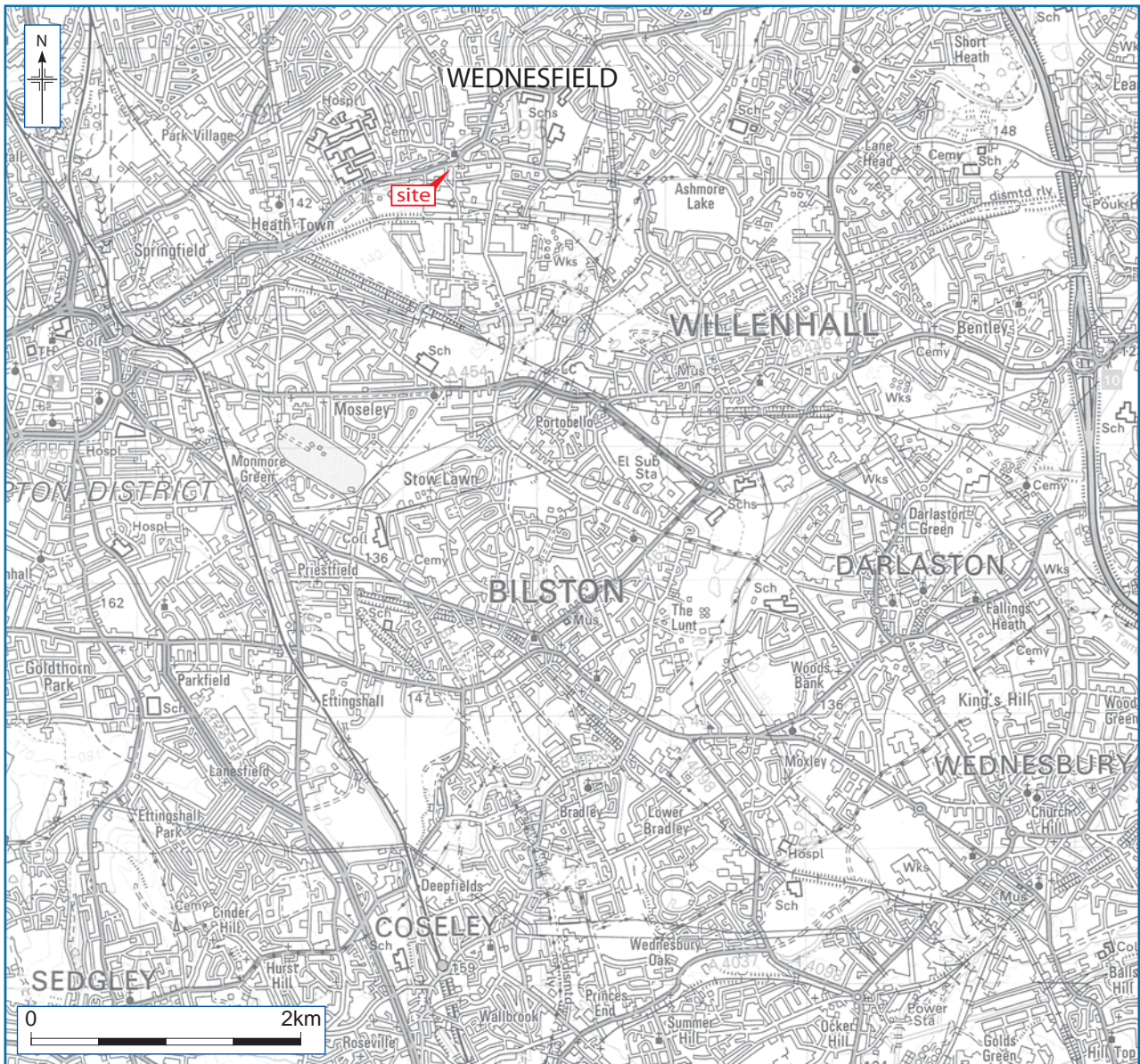
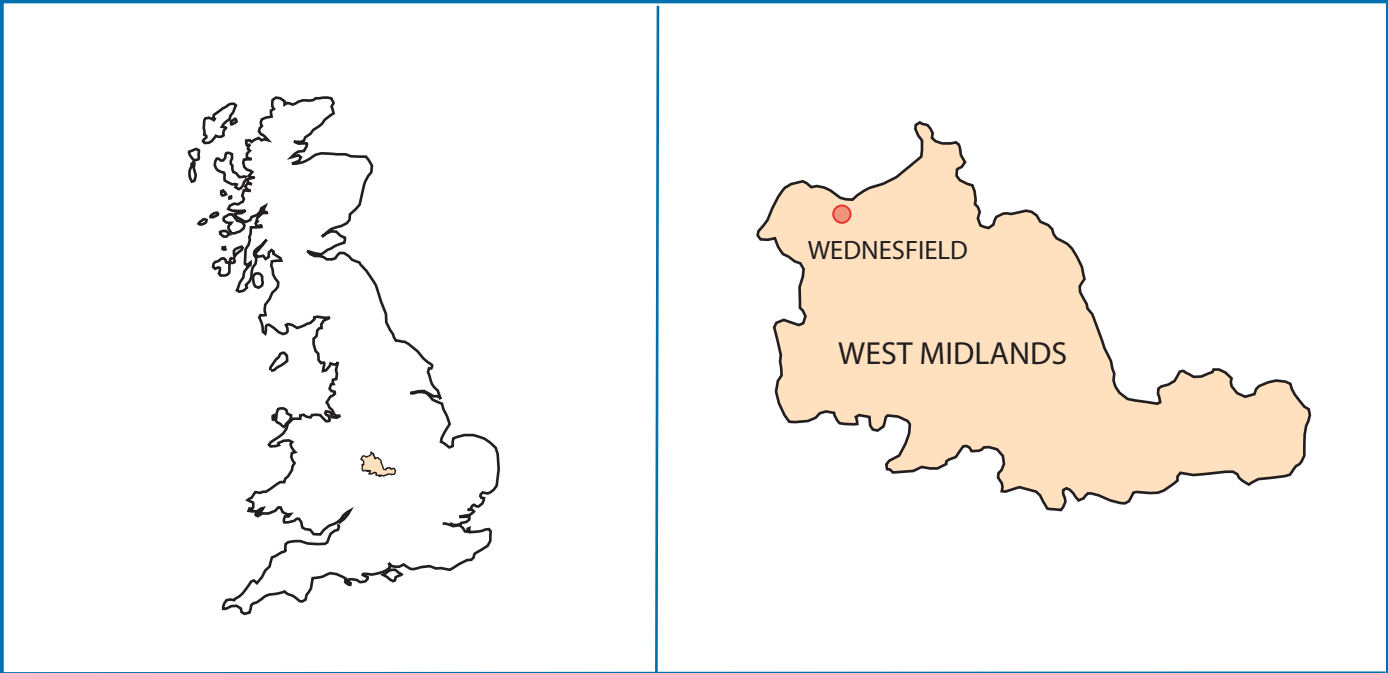
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**Figures**

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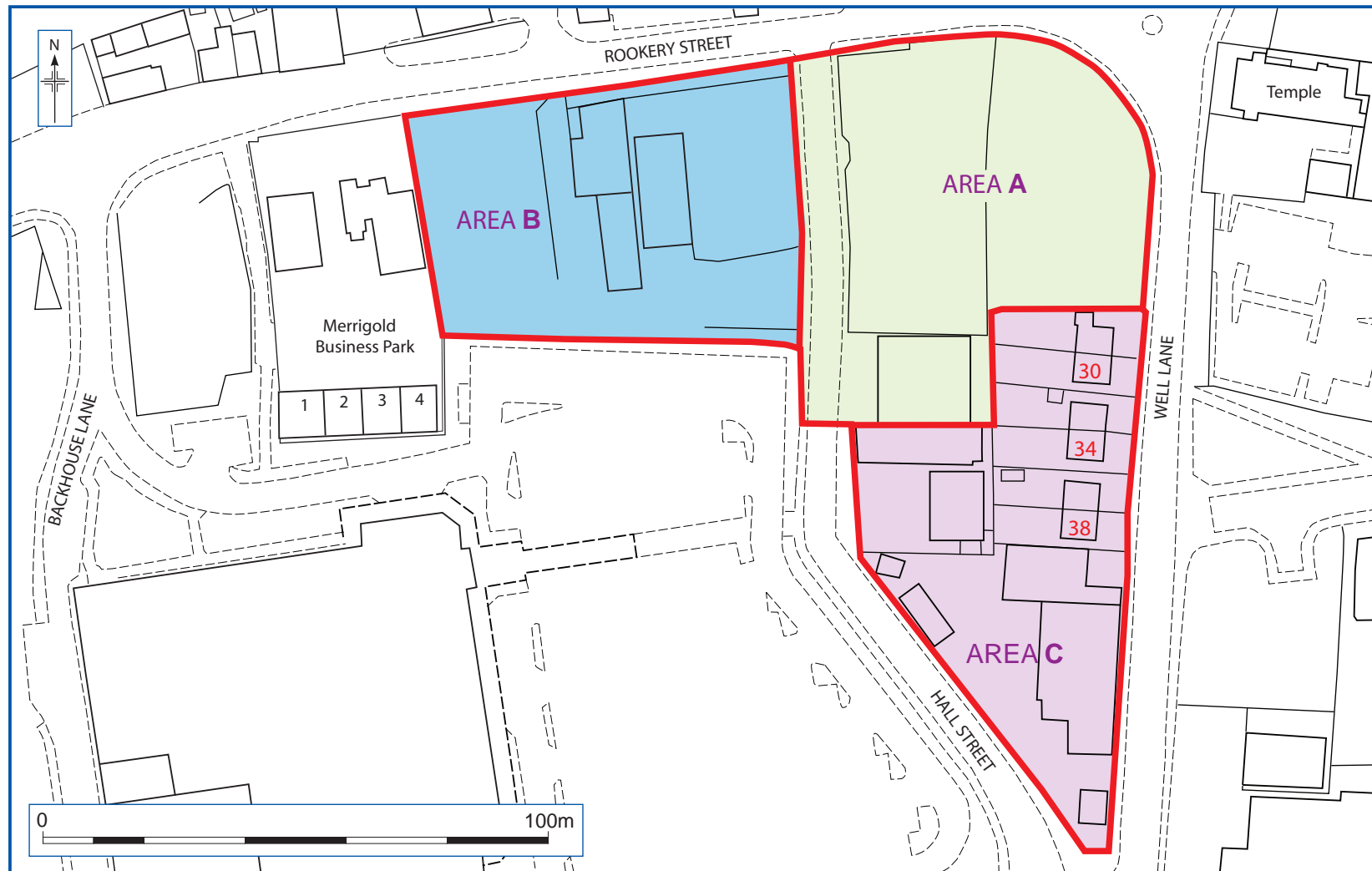




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Location of the site.

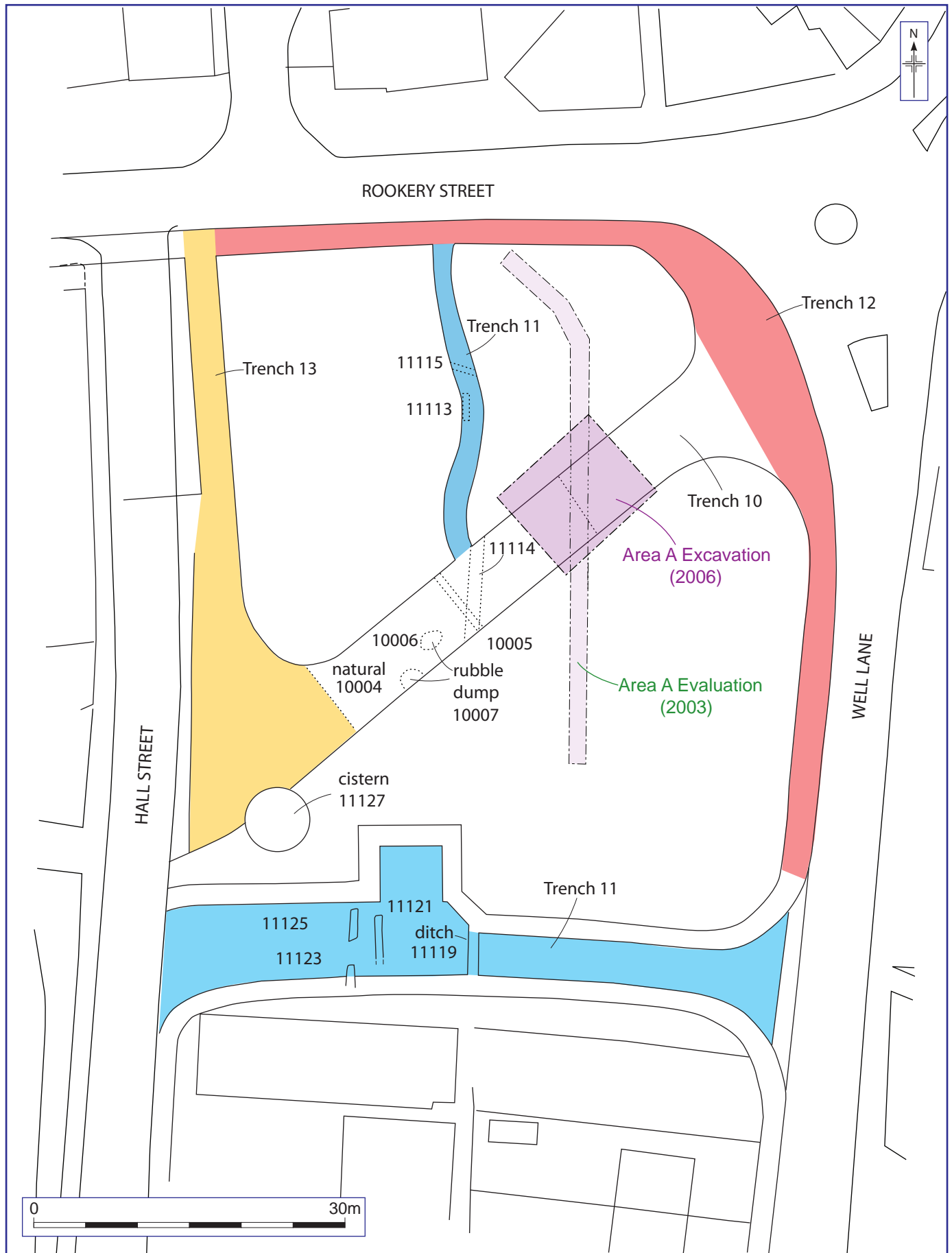
Figure 1



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Site Areas

Figure 2



Areas monitored

Figure 3



## Plates



*Plate 1 Trenches 10 and 11 with S and E facing sections, looking NE*



*Plate 2 Trench 11 looking N*





*Plate 3 Contexts 11113 and 11115, looking S*



*Plate 4 Context 11127, looking north*

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*Plate 5 Context 11119, looking west*





*Plate 6, 19<sup>th</sup> century cider jar from 11129*



*Plate 7 Stone from 11129 – cog wheel or weight?*

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## Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

### Trench 10

Site area: Area A

Maximum dimensions: Length: 50m Width: 8.00m Depth: 1.20m

Orientation: SW-NE

#### Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
10001	Topsoil	Loose dark grey silty clay, below turf	0.00-0.20m
10002	Layer	Made ground of loose dark grey clay silt containing cinder and rubble	0.20-1.10m
10003	Subsoil	Loose orange brown sandy silt	1.10-1.20m
10004	Natural	Friable orange brown clay silt with moderate rounded and angular pebbles	1.20m+
10005	Structure	Modern, double skinned brick wall, 1.60m wide, observed in SW section – equivalent to 11114	0.80m+
10006	Fill	Cinder and rubble, fill of pit 10007	1.10m+
10007	Cut	Heavily truncated modern pit, containing dumped material, not excavated.	1.10m+



**Trench 11**

Site area: Area A

Maximum dimensions: Length: 29m Width: 3.30m Depth: 1.20m (max)

Orientation: N-S

## Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
11111	Topsoil	Loose dark grey silty clay, below turf	0.00-0.25m
11112	Layer	Made ground of loose dark grey clay silt containing cinder and rubble	0.25-0.90m
11113	Structure	Brick structure, aligned N-S, 4.60 by 1.00m	0.90m+
11114	Structure	Modern, double skinned brick wall, 1.60m wide, observed in NE section – equivalent to 10005	0.80m+
11115	Structure	Modern double skinned brick wall aligned W-E, 3.30-0.30m	0.00-0.50m
11116	Topsoil	Disturbed topsoil, same as 10001, 11111	0.00-0.25m
11117	Subsoil	Same as 10003	1.10-1.20m
11118	Natural	Same as 10004	1.20m+
11119	Cut	Ditch, aligned N-S, 0.60m wide, not excavated	0.90m+
11120	Fill	Firm dark brown sandy silt, fill of 11119	0.90m+
11121	Cut	Truncated ditch, aligned N-S, 0.35m wide, not excavated	0.90m+
11122	Fill	Contaminated, firm dark grey clay containing cinder and rubble	0.90m+
11123	Cut	Foundation ditch for a wall	0.85m+
11124	Fill	Loose dark brown grey clay silt, fill of 11123	0.85m+
11125	Cut	Foundation ditch for a wall	0.85m+
11126	Fill	Loose dark brown grey clay silt, fill of 11125	0.85m+
11127	Structure	Brick lined cistern .1.70m deep with a diameter of 2.00m	0.80+2.30m
11128	Fill	Contaminated, mid brown grey sandy silt containing cider jar and stone cog wheel	0.85m+
11129	Structure	Lime rendering for 11127	0.80-2.30m

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**Trench 12**

Site area: Area A

Maximum dimensions: Length: c 150m Width: 2.30m Depth: 0.25m

Orientation: W-E curving N-S

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
12111	Topsoil	Loose dark grey silty clay, below turf	0.00-0.25m

**Trench 13**

Site area: Area A

Maximum dimensions: Length: 29m Width: 5m Depth: 0.30m

Orientation: N-S

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
13111	Topsoil	Loose dark grey silty clay, below turf	0.00-0.30m

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## **Appendix 2   Technical information**

### **The archive**

The archive consists of:

0036	Context records AS1
0005	Fieldwork progress records AS2
0001	Photographic records AS3
0048	Digital photographs
0003	Scale drawings
0001	Box of finds

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Wolverhampton Arts and Museum Service  
Wolverhampton City Council  
Wolverhampton Art Gallery  
Lichfield Street  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 1DU

Tel. Wolverhampton (01902) 552055

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