



RIVERSIDE ALLOTMENTS, WIGAN, LANCASHIRE

Archaeological Watching Brief

Oxford Archaeology North



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SUMMARY

A watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North on 13th July 2005 at land in the Riverside Allotments district of Wigan, Lancashire (centred on SD 5880 0650). United Utilities propose to develop the site, which lies within an area of recognised archaeological potential, for sewerage treatment. Following a request for a watching brief by the Assistant Archaeologist at Greater Manchester Archaeology Unit (GMAU), Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was commissioned to undertake the watching brief during all the topsoil stripping and ground disturbance associated with the proposed development.

In the event, through circumstance beyond the control of OA North, most of the ground-works were completed in the absence of an archaeological presence, and those that were conducted under archaeological observation yielded nothing of any archaeological significance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OA North would like to thank United Utilities for commissioning the project, and to Mr Andy Parker and colleagues of AMCO Donelon for their assistance on site.

The watching brief was undertaken by David Tonks, who also wrote the report. The drawings were compiled by Mark Tidmarsh. The project was managed by Alison Plummer who edited the report, along with Alan Lupton.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Following the submission by United Utilities of a planning application to develop an area of land in the Riverside area of Wigan (centred on SD 5880 0650) for sewage treatment purposes, the Assistant Archaeologist at GMAU recommended that an archaeological watching brief be conducted during any associated ground disturbance resulting from the works. In accordance with this brief, a project design (*Appendix 1*) was supplied by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North). The project design was approved, and OA North were duly commissioned to undertake the watching brief. This was undertaken on 13th July 2005 and this report sets out the results in the form of a short document.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

- 2.1.1 Circumstances beyond the control of OA North dictated that the project design was not followed in full (*Section 3.1*), but such work as was carried out was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists and generally accepted best practice.

2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.2.1 It was the intent of the programme of field observation to record accurately the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features. This work would have comprised observation during the topsoil strip and the ground-works including the examination and accurate recording of all archaeological features, horizons and any artefacts found during the excavations.
- 2.2.2 The recording comprised a full description of the site on OA North *pro-forma* sheets, and a photographic record in colour slide and monochrome formats was compiled.

2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full archive of the work undertaken has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The archive will be deposited with Wigan History Shop, and a copy of the report will be forwarded to the Greater Manchester Sites and Monuments Record.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 3.1.1 **Location:** the site occupied an area of approximately 600 square metres (centred on SD 5880 0650) toward the base of a small, steep valley created by the now canalised River Douglas, to which it was adjacent. The immediate vicinity was one of mixed woodland, which had recently been colonised by Japanese Knotweed, a Victorian import, which has spread invasively and is subject to strict controls.
- 3.1.2 **Geology:** the geology of the area forms part of the Lancashire Coal Measures, which extend from the Mersey Valley in the south to the Amounderness Plain in the north-west (Countryside Commission 1998, 127). The overlying drift geology is glacial and post-glacially derived tills, with fluvial deposits of gravel along the course of the River Douglas (op cit), which lies just to the west of the study area.

3.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.3.1 **Prehistoric period:** there is relatively little evidence for prehistoric activity around Wigan, and none in the vicinity of the study area. Two stray finds are recorded from the wider area: a Neolithic polished stone axe was found at Gidlow (Jackson 1936, 74), and a Bronze Age axe hammer, now lost, was discovered near Bottling Wood to the north-east of the study area (UMAU 2001, 7).
- 3.3.2 **Romano-British period:** the site of Wigan had long been associated with the settlement of *Coccium*, which is recorded in the Antonine Itinerary as lying 17 miles from Manchester. Weight has been added to this conjecture by a number of artefacts of Roman date that were discovered across Wigan during the nineteenth century as a result of construction work in the Wallgate, King Street and Darlington Street area (Hannavy 1990, 8). A particular concentration of finds has been identified on the higher ground around Library Street and Millgate (Hawkes 1935, 43), and the remains of a probable Roman cemetery were also discovered during the construction of the gas works on the southern edge of the town between 1822 and 1830 (Watkin 1883, 20). In the early 19th century, a defensive ditch and *agger* were reportedly visible along the north side of the town centre, although there is some debate over the probable date of this observation (SMR 4057.1.0).
- 3.3.3 However, it was not until excavations were carried out in the 1980s that actual Roman settlement remains were identified in Wigan. These were at first only slight and lacking in structural remains (Holdsworth and Reynolds 1981, 2). A hearth, discovered in the Wiend in 1982-3, was the first Roman feature in the town to have been subject to detailed archaeological excavation (Tindall 1983, 2). These investigations eventually revealed the remains of what has been interpreted as a Roman military industrial site, comprising a series of timber buildings, furnaces and hearths and a metalled road, and it is considered likely

that further Roman remains existed near the summit of the hill in Wigan town centre before being largely destroyed by Georgian and Victorian cellars (*op cit*, 29-30). The results obtained from this work added weight to the suggestion that Wigan is indeed the site of *Coccium*, although the nature, function and longevity of the Roman settlement remained uncertain. Indeed, whilst the main phase of activity appears to have come to an end by the early years of the 3rd century, basic questions remain regarding the chronology and nature of the Roman occupation not only in Wigan, but also in the wider area (Buxton and Shotter 1996, 77). Similarly, it remains unclear as to what form of occupation there might have been following the collapse of Roman administration.

- 3.3.4 **Medieval period:** Wigan is not named in the Domesday survey, but it is thought to be the ‘church of the manor’ of Newton (Powell 1998, 6). The name Wigan does not appear until 1199, and it has been suggested that the name refers to the presence of a Roman road; the Saxon for road being *waeg*, although it is also thought to relate to a British personal name (UMAU 2001, 9). During the thirteenth century Wigan began to prosper, in part due to the granting of a market charter and three day fair in 1245 (Hannavy 1990, 20). It gained Royal Borough status a year later, and Wigan gradually grew in size and prosperity as a result. As a Royal Borough, the citizens received the rights and privileges of freemen, or ‘burgesses’, which included the right to rent a burgage plot as free tenants of the lord of the manor. The size of the burgage plots was specified as five roods of land, for which an annual rent of 12d was levied (Bridgeman 1888-90, 9-10).
- 3.3.5 By the mid-13th century Wigan was one of the larger chartered towns of Lancashire, along with Lancaster, Preston, Liverpool, Manchester and Warrington (White 1996, 129). This is demonstrated in its assessment as a borough in the exchequer lay subsidies of 1332 (Morris 1983). The expansion of the town was also reflected in the construction of a bridge over the River Douglas at the bottom of Millgate, which was authorised by an Act of Parliament in 1334 (Hannavy 1990, 36).
- 3.3.6 During the medieval period Wigan was essentially an agricultural town but a variety of industries developed at an early date, including textile manufacture, coal mining and metal working, which comprised the production of iron, pewter and brass (Powell 1998, 8). The manufacture of felt hats was also carried out in Wigan, and whilst this was originally a cottage-based industry, mills for the trade were built in 1782 (*ibid*). Textile production was dominated by the woollen industry, which was sufficiently well-established by the early fourteenth century to support three fulling mills (Hannavy 1990, 34). However, during the mid-fifteenth century there was a significant decline in trade and many burgage plots may have been abandoned or decreased in use during this time (UMAU 2001, 10). Despite this, it is probable that the present street pattern reflects the medieval development of the town and the continuity of plots laid out during the medieval period.
- 3.3.7 It has been suggested that the town had some sort of defensive circuit during this period, which possibly took the form of an earth bank and ditch (Powell

1998, 8). This may have enclosed an irregular, oval-shaped area bounded approximately by the River Douglas, Dicconson Street (towards the southern end of Standishgate), New Market Street, Dorning Street and King Street (*ibid*).

3.3.8 The physical remains of medieval Wigan have been uncovered in several excavations within the town centre; cultivation soils and a timber-lined well or cistern were excavated at the Wiend (Jones and Price 1985, 29), and post-holes and pottery dating to the fourteenth or fifteenth century were uncovered at Chapel Street (GMAU 1987, 2). The remains of two medieval burgage plots with a substantial town house constructed of timber were also discovered on Hallgate (GMAU 2001). The excavated burgage plots were found to be each at least 5m wide, and between 30m and 40m in length (*ibid*). Recent archaeological work at 130 – 130a Standishgate also yielded physical remains of medieval date (OA North 2005). Evidence for the earliest activity on the site, which was dated to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, was represented by several large pit features that yielded a small, but significant, assemblage of medieval pottery. There were no structural remains associated with these pits, suggesting that any medieval buildings that had occupied the site had been of an insubstantial nature. Nevertheless, the excavated features provided new evidence for the extent of the urban fringe associated with medieval Wigan.

3.3.9 **Post-medieval period:** in broad terms, the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries was a period of increased growth and prosperity for Wigan; the town probably expanded in size by about 30 percent during the sixteenth century to a total population of approximately 4000 by 1600 (Hannavy 1990, 46), and by the 1630s Wigan had become one of the most populace towns in Lancashire. New buildings constructed in the rear part of the medieval burgage plots within the central part of the town, and by 1538 John Leland was able to describe Wigan as ‘*a paved town as big as Warrington, but better builded...*’ (Chandler 1998, 269). However, an eyewitness account of Wigan during the late 18th century gives the impression that development at this time was rather *ad hoc*: ‘*The main streets of the town are broad, but irregularly built, with a mixture of old and modern houses.*’ (Aiken 1795, 294). The outbreak of the Civil War in 1642 represented a severe check on the town’s fortunes and Wigan entered the war as a Royalist stronghold, for which it was later subjected to a punitive taxation under the Commonwealth. Wigan Lane, close to the subject site, is also known as Bloody Mountains and is the site of a Civil War battle fought in 1651.

3.3.10 The growth of Wigan during this period was largely the result of the coal, iron and textile industries, particularly woollen cloths, linen, calicos and checks. The town specialised in the manufacture of woollen bedding textiles, which were produced in cottage hand-loom shops (Powell 1998, 9). In 1627, the Wigan Company of Pewterers was founded, and the town emerged as one of the most important centres for pewter production in the county (*op cit*, 10), whilst other metal-working industries also developed (Tindall 1985, 23). In particular, the manufacture of brass products, bell founding and watchmaking emerged as important industries active in the town during the 17th century. A contemporary account noted that the design and manufacture of clocks and

non-ferrous metal foundries for small bells, candlesticks and other household goods continued to be important trades during the mid-eighteenth century (Berg and Berg 2001, 295).

- 3.3.11 Coal mining in the Wigan area during the medieval period had been carried out on what was essentially small-scale, open-cast sites, but by the sixteenth century mining was mostly underground (Hannavy 1990, 69). A document of 1619 provides one of the earliest references to a coal pit on Millgate itself (UMAU 2001, 9). By the late 18th century, the Wigan coalfield had become the centre of the region's coal trade, and was recognised as one of the most important of the Lancashire coalfields of this period (Farrer and Brownbill 1908, 357). This was partially on account of rich deposits of cannel coal, which burns with a bright flame and produces very little ash, and thus was in great demand for household use and invariably sold for a higher price than ordinary coal. The coal industry continued to expand through the nineteenth century; by 1874 there were 140 collieries operating in the Wigan area, many of which continued in use into the twentieth century (Ashmore 1982). Trade was helped by the completion of the Douglas Navigation in 1742 and the opening of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in 1774, which generated large amounts of trade, not least with Ireland (Clarke 1994, 43).
- 3.3.12 Cotton was beginning to be the dominant element of the textile industry by the later eighteenth century; in 1754, the Swedish industrial spy RR Angerstein noted that '*large numbers of women and children were occupied with the spinning of cotton*' (Berg and Berg 2001, 295). Some 40 years later, Aiken (1795, 294) commented that '*the cotton manufactory, as in all other places, intrudes upon the old staple of the place*'. Although slow by national standards the introduction of steam-powered mills during the early part of the nineteenth century meant that the textile industry remained an important part of the local economy; at one point in the nineteenth century, the industry accounted for over 50 percent of the employment in the town (Hannavy 1990, 116). The new process of ring spinning was introduced in a Wigan textile mill in 1887, and from 1888 the Wigan firm of Ffarington, Eckersley & Co Ltd became for three decades the largest ring spinners in Britain (Williams and Farnie 1992, 35).
- 3.3.13 The continuing prosperity of the town meant that the population increased at a tremendous rate during the nineteenth century. Much of the population were housed in tightly-packed courts and small terraces, with the result that sanitation reached correspondingly poor levels (UMAU 2001, 12). As a result, the waterworks and gasworks were improved, public swimming baths built and roads widened and improved (*ibid*). During the twentieth century Wigan's two main industries, coal and textiles declined, although engineering and food processing became increasingly important and contributed greatly to the area's economy (McNeil and Nevell 2000, 66).

4. RESULTS

4.1 OBSERVATIONS

- 4.1.1 **Introduction:** the works involved the deforestation of the immediate site, occasioning the removal of trees and the stripping of topsoil. The works further involved the excavation of a pipe trench with a manhole chamber at the eastern end.
- 4.1.2 Upon arrival, it was apparent that the works had largely been undertaken in the absence of an archaeological presence. The trees had been felled and removed and the topsoil strip had been effected (Plate 1). The pipe trench, measuring approximately 30.0m, had been excavated and the pipe laid and the trench backfilled (Plate 2). The ground covering the pipe, and of the site in general, was soft sandy clay mix of topsoil and subsoils which have been repeatedly redeposited and churned by the action of site traffic negating the possibility of archaeological observation (Plate 1).
- 4.1.3 The chamber pit to the eastern end of the trench was open and measured c3.0m x 3.0m x 2.0m. It was shored to some degree and partially backfilled with crushed stone, but the visible stratigraphy (Plate 3) comprised entirely medium to light greyish buff clay natural with some sand. There were no archaeological horizons observed.
- 4.1.4 One section of the pipe, to the east of the manhole chamber, was excavated in the presence of an archaeologist. This measured approximately 10.0m and was being excavated entirely through made-ground comprising dark grey sandy-clay topsoil with inclusions of plastic, bottles, wire and other modern detritus. There were no archaeological horizons encountered.
- 4.1.5 The west end of the trench adjacent to the River Douglas was shored but open for inspection (Plate 4). The stratigraphy comprised 0.4m mid grey sandy clay topsoil over dark grey brown clay subsoil to a depth of 1.5m, below which the section is obscured by backfill comprising imported stone fragments.

4.2 FINDS

- 4.2.1 The ground and the spoilheaps were scoured for finds, but only modern plastics, bottles and pot were encountered. They were of no archaeological significance and were not retained.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 CONCLUSION

- 5.1.1 Although located within a general area of recognised archaeological potential, no significant finds nor archaeological horizons were observed during the programme of works. This is principally due to the work being largely completed in the absence of an archaeological presence.

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APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DESIGN

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 United Utilities (hereafter the client) have proposed the development of Riverside Allotments, Wigan (centred SD58800650) for sewerage treatment. The site is within the vicinity of a Civil War battle called Wigan Lane. The battle is recorded on the Greater Manchester Sites and Monuments (SMR No 4771).
- 1.2 The Assistant Archaeologist at Greater Manchester Archaeology Unit, Sites and Monument Record has recommended that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken and a contingency fund identified to cover emergency excavation and conservation of any sensitive archaeological features or finds.
- 1.3 Wigan Lane, also known as Bloody Mountains, is the site of a Civil War battle which took place in 1651. The development area lies on the periphery of the battle field. The battle took place between the Parliamentarians under Colonel Lilburne and the Royalist Earl of Derby. The battle was a victory to the Parliamentarians.
- 1.4 OA North has considerable experience of the assessment, evaluation and excavation of sites of all periods, having undertaken a great number of small and large-scale projects during the past 17 years. Watching briefs, evaluations and excavations have taken place within the planning process, to fulfil the requirements of clients and planning authorities, to very rigorous timetables.
- 1.5 OA North has the professional expertise and resources to undertake the project detailed below to a high level of quality and efficiency. OA North is an Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) registered organisation, registration number 17, and all its members of staff operate subject to the IFA Code of Conduct.

2 OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The following programme has been designed to evaluate the archaeological resource of the proposed development area. The required stages to achieve this are as follows:
- 2.2 ***Permanent Presence Watching Brief:*** this will be undertaken during all topsoil stripping and ground disturbance associated with the proposed development..
- 2.3 ***Report and Archive:*** production of a report following the collation of data during section 2.2 and 2.3 above.

3 METHOD STATEMENT

- 3.1.1 ***Methodology:*** a programme of field observation will accurately record the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features and/or deposits within the topsoil stripping activities in the course of the proposed development works. A systematic examination of any subsoil horizons exposed during the course of the groundworks, and the accurate recording of

- all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified during observation.
- 3.1.2 During this phase of work, recording will comprise a full description and preliminary classification of features or materials revealed, and their accurate location (either on plan and/or section, and as grid co-ordinates where appropriate). Features will be planned accurately at appropriate scales and annotated on to a large-scale plan provided by the Client. A photographic record will be undertaken simultaneously.
- 3.1.3 A plan will be produced of the areas of groundworks showing the location and extent of the ground disturbance and one or more dimensioned sections will be produced.
- 3.1.4 Putative archaeological features and/or deposits identified by the machining process, together with the immediate vicinity of any such features, will be cleaned by hand, using either hoes, shovel scraping, and/or trowels depending on the subsoil conditions, and where appropriate sections will be studied and drawn. Any such features will be sample excavated (ie selected pits and postholes will normally only be half-sectioned, linear features will be subject to no more than a 10% sample, and extensive layers will, where possible, be sampled by partial rather than complete removal).
- 3.1.5 It is assumed that OA North will have the authority to stop the works for a sufficient time period to enable the recording of important deposits. It may also be necessary to call in additional archaeological support if a find of particular importance is identified or a high density of archaeology is discovered, but this would only be called into effect in agreement with the Client and the County Archaeology Service and will require a variation to costing. Also, should evidence of burials be identified, the 1857 Burial Act would apply and a Home Office Licence would be sought. This would involve all work ceasing until the proper authorities were happy for burials to be removed. In normal circumstances, field recording will also include a continual process of analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of the data, in order to establish the necessity for any further more detailed recording that may prove essential.
- 3.1.6 **Health and Safety:** OA North provides a Health and Safety Statement for all projects and maintains a Unit Safety policy. All site procedures are in accordance with the guidance set out in the Health and Safety Manual compiled by the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (1997). A written risk assessment will be undertaken in advance of project commencement and copies will be made available on request to all interested parties.
- 3.1.7 OA North has professional indemnity to a value of £2,000,000, employer's liability cover to a value of £10,000,000 and public liability to a value of £15,000,000. Written details of insurance cover can be provided if required.

3.2 ARCHIVE/REPORT

- 3.2.1 **Archive:** the results of all archaeological work carried out will form the basis for a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition, 1991). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the project. The deposition of a properly ordered and indexed project archive in an appropriate repository is considered an essential and integral element of all archaeological projects by the IFA in that organisation's code of conduct. OA North conforms to best practice in the preparation of project archives for long-term storage. This archive will be provided in the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology format and a synthesis will be submitted to the SMR (the index to the archive and a copy of the report). OA North practice is to deposit the original record archive of projects (paper, magnetic and plastic media) with the appropriate County Record Office, and a full copy of the record archive (microform or microfiche) together with the material archive (artefacts, ecofacts, and samples) with an appropriate museum. Wherever possible, OA North recommends the deposition of such material in a local museum approved by the Museums and Galleries Commission, and would make appropriate arrangements with the designated museum at the outset of the project for the proper labelling, packaging, and accessioning of all material recovered.
- 3.2.2 **Report:** one bound and one unbound copy of a written synthetic report will be submitted to the client, and a further two copies submitted to the Greater Manchester SMR within eight weeks of completion of fieldwork. The report will include a copy of this project design, and indications of any agreed departure from that design. It will present, summarise, and interpret the results of the programme detailed above and will include a full index of archaeological features identified in the course of the project, with an assessment of the overall stratigraphy, together with appropriate illustrations, including detailed plans and sections indicating the locations of archaeological features. Any finds recovered will be assessed with reference to other local material and any particular or unusual features of the assemblage will be highlighted and the potential of the site for palaeoenvironmental analysis will be considered. The report will also include a complete bibliography of sources from which data has been derived.
- 3.2.3 This report will identify areas of defined archaeology. An assessment and statement of the actual and potential archaeological significance of the identified archaeology within the broader context of regional and national archaeological priorities will be made. Illustrative material will include a location map, section drawings, and plans. This report will be in the same basic format as this project design; a copy of the report can be provided on 3.5" disk (IBM compatible format), if required.
- 3.2.4 Provision will be made for a summary report to be submitted to a suitable regional or national archaeological journal within one year of completion of fieldwork, if relevant results are obtained.

3.2.5 Emergency excavation: in the event of the discovery of significant archaeological remains, it is likely that there would be a requirement for an emergency excavation. The methodology for this would be produced following discussions with the Assistant Archaeology and be subject to a separate project design. It should be noted that the requirement for an excavation would possibly necessitate a delay to development works and include a programme of both fieldwork and post-excavation. A contingency fund is included in *Section 7*.

3.2.6 Confidentiality: all internal reports to the client are designed as documents for the specific use of the Client, for the particular purpose as defined in the project brief and project design, and should be treated as such. They are not suitable for publication as academic documents or otherwise without amendment or revision.

4 PROJECT MONITORING

4.1 Monitoring of this project will be undertaken through the auspices of the GMAUSMR Archaeologist, who will be informed of the start and end dates of the work.

5 WORK TIMETABLE

5.1 OA North could commence the watching brief within two weeks of receipt of written notification from the client.

5.2 The duration of the project will be dependent upon the progress of the contractor.

5.3 At this stage it is not possible to offer a programme for the contingency excavation but it would be unreasonable to suggest that a period of four weeks would be required.

5.4 A copy of the report will be submitted to the Assistant County Archaeologist at GMAUSMR

5.5 The client report will be completed within eight weeks following completion of the fieldwork.

6 STAFFING

6.1 The project will be under the direct management of **Alison Plummer BSc (Hons)** (OA North Senior Project Manager) to whom all correspondence should be addressed.

6.2 The watching brief will be undertaken by an OA North Project Supervisor. All OA North project supervisors have a great deal of experience in the undertaking of watching briefs.

ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Location map

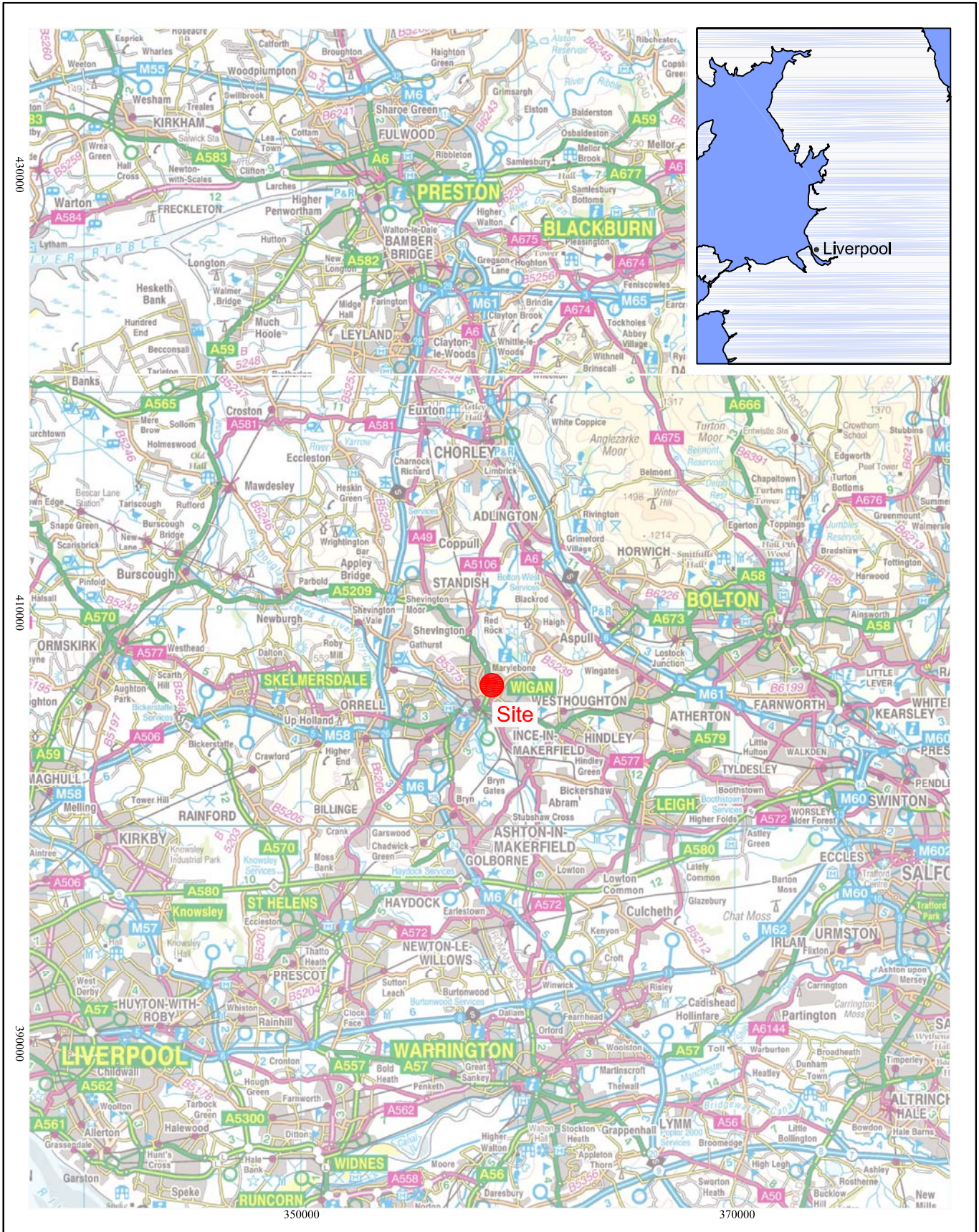
LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: The site facing west

Plate 2: The site facing north-east

Plate 3: South-facing section, manhole chamber

Plate 4: North-facing section, west end of pipe trench



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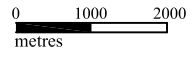


Figure 1: Location Map



Plate 1: The site facing west



Plate 2: The site facing north-east



Plate 3: South-facing section, manhole chamber



Plate 4: North-facing section, west end of pipe trench