HIGHBURY PARK: ARCHAEOLOGY

The approximate location and extent of archaeological features is shown on the attached map. The features consist of prehistoric burnt mounds, and field boundaries and ridge and furrow which are the remains of medieval or later cultivation.

Burnt Mounds

These are mounds of heat-shattered stones and charcoal which normally date to the Bronze Age, about 1200 BC, and are interpreted as the result of heating water for cooking or steam bathing. About 25 of these sites have been recorded in Birmingham, mostly visible as layers of stones and charcoal in stream banks, in parks or open spaces. There are two definite and one possible burnt mounds in Highbury Park.

1. Sites and Monuments Record No. 20014

A mound about 18.5m long, 7m wide, and 0.40m high on the south bank of the stream. Its limits are clearly indicated by parching.

2. Sites and Monuments Record No. 2882

Recorded in 1980, as burnt stones and charcoal exposed in the sides of a drainage channel on the south bank of the stream. Radiocarbon date from charcoal: 1025 + 80 bc (about 1150 BC). No longer visible.

3. Possible Site

2 adjoining parched areas, slightly raised, visible on the south side of the stream in July 1994. This may be another burnt mound, or could be the end of the bank of field boundary.

Field Boundaries

Each of the former field boundaries consists of a bank, sometimes accompanied by a ditch, with trees along it. None of the boundaries can be dated from their appearance.

Ridge and Furrow

Parallel ridges, the remnants of previous cultivation. Some ridge and furrow is medieval in origin, and often corresponds to strip holdings in open field systems. Medieval ridge and furrow usually has high, broad ridges which curve in a reversed-s form rather than run straight. Narrow, low and straight ridges are likely to be more recent in date.

There is ridge-and-furrow of varying width over much of Highbury Park, indicating that most, if not all, of the park has been cultivated at some time in the past. The ridge-and-furrow in the south-west is narrow, and probably 18th or 19th century. In the south-east the ridge-and-furrow is broader, and possibly earlier in date. To the north of the pool, ridge-and-furrow c. 4m wide may be medieval.

Recommendations

It is important that any future proposals for the park do not damage the burnt mounds. Geophysical surveys could be carried out to locate any other features associated with the burnt mounds. The ridge-and-furrow and old field boundaries are remnants of former land use and should be preserved. Documentary and map research may provide some information about their date. Public awareness of the archaeological features could be increased by the provision of appropriate information in a visitor centre or near the park entrances.

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27 July 1994

UD/C/MAH/PGF/R71