

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
DURING GROUNDWORKS AT
STONE HOUSE, CORVE STREET,
LUDLOW,
SHROPSHIRE



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Archaeological watching brief during groundworks at Stone House, Corve Street, Ludlow, Shropshire

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Stone House, Corve Street, Ludlow (NGR SO 5114 7510) in February 2012 by Mike Napthan Archaeology. The project was intended to provide a record of buried deposits exposed in the foundation trenches for a new garden wall enclosing the rear garden of "Stone House". Stone House is a Grade II Listed Building, described as having a mid 19th century front to late 18th century core. The frontage is unusually fine for a domestic building, and embellished with Corinthian columns. The building is presently being converted back to a house (from offices) and restored.*

The project produced no finds of note, the only potentially archaeologically significant features being two shallow stone built foundations possibly relating to an earlier rear yard enclosure or outbuilding. There was no clear dating evidence for these features, but they appeared to probably relate to the later 18th and 19th Century house. The excavated deposits were artefactually sparse, producing only a small number of late post medieval artefacts dating from the later 18th and 19th Centuries. As the excavated trenches were shallow (circa 0.75m max) there remains some potential for earlier and deeper archaeological horizons to survive within the site boundaries.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A programme of archaeological recording was undertaken by Mike Napthan Archaeology. The project is being undertaken on behalf of the landowners Mr and Mrs T Dickins (the Clients). The site is located to the north-west of the centre of Ludlow, in an area of archaeological interest associated with the late medieval suburb of Corve Street and a . The project was based upon a brief supplied by Mike Krupa of Shropshire CC. The project is based upon a requirement for archaeological watching brief specified by Mick Krupa Historic Environment Records Officer Shropshire County Council to meet an archaeological condition of planning permission – Application Number 11/03213 Condition 7. “ *No development approved by this permission shall commence until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such a programme must be prepared and carried out under the supervision and with the agreement of an archaeologist approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Reason: The site is known to be in an area of archaeological importance*”.
- 1.2 The site location is at NGR SO 5114 7510 (Fig 1). It should be noted that the building was until recently part of the Council Offices, and formed part of a larger land parcel (the original Stone House backplot) prior to being subdivided from the carpark of the Council Offices. The present property consists of Stone House itself plus a small rear garden. The remainder of the property is now occupied by Council Offices and associated carparking. A part of the former stable block of Stone House has been converted to council offices, but the remaining buildings on the site are modern. Stone House is presently being restored back to domestic use after many years as offices.

- 1.3 This report represents the findings of the watching brief during the excavation of foundation trenches for the new garden wall. The project was designed to provide a record of archaeological deposits exposed, and to establish the potential archaeological significance of the site. The project design was prepared in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994). Codes of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists were followed.

2 Aims

- 2.1 The aims of the archaeological project were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of the below ground archaeological resource in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature of the resource within the site (including presence or absence, character, extent, date, state of preservation and quality)

These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:

- i) to define and identify the nature of the archaeological deposits present on the site of the new garden, and to date previous phases of historic activity where possible;
- ii) to attempt to characterize the depositional sequence and recover as much information as possible about the any discrete archaeologically significant features or structures surviving .
- iii) Identify any significant features threatened by the proposed works and to indicate appropriate mitigation strategies.

3 Methodology

- 3.1 A search of the Shropshire Historic Environment Record was commissioned to establish the nature of the archaeological resource, and the extent of previous archaeological interventions in the immediate vicinity of Stone House.
- 3.2 The watching brief was conducted in February 2012. The area of the new garden is presently a tarmac carparking surface with areas of block paving and raised planter beds. The foundation trenches for the intended new stone faced garden boundary wall were cut through the surfacing (of which there were two layers of tarmac) by disc cutter, then mechanically excavated using a small tracked 360° wheeled excavator working under archaeological supervision. The progress of works was recorded photographically, and selected areas of potential archaeological interest hand cleaned and recorded in greater detail. A representative partial section was drawn at 1:20, and significant features plotted on a 1:50 plan. The photographic archive accompanies this report on DVD.
- 3.3 The recovered artefacts comprised of two stone roof slab fragments (retained on site), two small sherds of “blue and white” china of the late 18th-late 19th C, and a fragment of clay tobacco pipe stem. Residual bone observed on site was not retained. In view of the insignificance of the assemblage (less than 50g in total) no further study has been undertaken.

4 Archaeological Background

- 4.1 Stone House is described on the Shropshire SMR as monument 11127 “A house, now council offices, mid 19th century front to late 18th century core, which is protected by Grade II* Listing” the remainder of the entry is a recitation of the Listing Description: House, now Council Offices. Mid C19 front to late C18 core. Stucco; stone; hipped Welsh slate roof; corbelled stucco stacks to left and right. Central staircase plan. 3-storeys; 3-window range: 2, 6/6 sashes in moulded architraves with modillioned pediments on enriched consoles, set between Corinthian pilasters, flanking margin-glazed French windows with casement panels, in similar setting; all have balustered balconettes, on moulded storey band; three 3/3 sashes with shouldered architraves, under moulded cornice with modillions and scrolled brackets, under balustraded parapet. Central porch with arch on springers, narrow round-headed

openings to sides; 2-panel, imitation 2-leaf, door. Returned sides: returned cornice, frieze and parapet; 1st floor storey band. Wing to rear has lantern and half hipped roof, with further hipped roof to rear gable with kneelers to coped parapet on enriched corbels; stone segmental flat arch over 15/10 sash. Stone stack, with brick above roof level. Interior: open well staircase with stick balusters; rear winder stair with stick balusters; ornamental plasterwork, including panelled light-well; fireplaces. (Ludlow Historical Research Group; Clifton-Taylor, 1978 p166). The house is little changed in plan since the mid 19th C, and early Ordnance Survey mapping (Fig 2) shows no earlier buildings within the intended rear garden area.

- 4.2 The nearest previous archaeological intervention was an evaluation of the site of the former Carmelite Friary (Monument 01772) at Corve Street. Excavations in NE corner of Victorian graveyard (Monument 06133) directly opposite the Stone House property) by BUFAU (SMR reference ESA 2284). The site of the Friary is now partially occupied by the redundant St Leonard's church (Monument 06132). Evaluation trenches revealed two phases of occupation prior to the acquisition of the site by the friars. These early phases (part of Monument 06299) consisted of, firstly, a post built structure and aisled hall with stone footings (C12/C13), and, secondly, a stone or stone/timber town house (late C13/C14): the latter had been demolished for the construction of the friary buildings. Remains associated with the friary included several stone buildings dated to the 14th century. One of these was interpreted as the refectory, with remains being found of a stone tiled roof, glazed windows and a stone hearth. Six burials were found. Post-friary deposits included demolition levels dated to c1540, remains of a 16th/17th century house and later post medieval pits (Klein & Roe 1987). Subsequent work on the friary site has been limited: A watching brief (SMR reference ESA5926) was undertaken in February 2005 across an area measuring 5.4m x 3.56m within the deconsecrated (and Listed) St Leonards Church, now a printing works. Groundworks entailed the removal of a raised platform where the altar had previously been located (against the east wall of the church) and subsequent excavation to match the ground level elsewhere in the building. The altar plinth and steps included dressed stonework, and there was a rubble build up layer. No other features or artefacts were recorded (Border Archaeology, 2005).
- 4.3 An archaeological evaluation (SMR reference ESA5005) was carried out in 1999 at the site of the present Tesco supermarket store on Corve Street, Ludlow, about 75m south of the Stone House. Trench 1 revealed evidence of late medieval and post medieval stone founded buildings, including a cellar backfilled in the early 17th century. Earlier medieval timber buildings, hearths, floors, pits and ovens were also encountered demonstrating a complete stratigraphic sequence indicating continuous development on the site. During the excavations, trench 2 was discontinued after it became apparent that the level of disturbance was too great. It did however; reveal evidence of a post medieval cellar, backfilled during the early 20th century. Trench 3 and 5 revealed evidence of late medieval and post medieval stone founded buildings and surfaces. Trench 4 revealed evidence of late medieval and post medieval stone founded buildings and surfaces. A possible medieval tanning pit and elements of a medieval timber structure were also detected. The results of these excavations have revealed evidence of several phases of the development of medieval Ludlow. The earliest activity on this site is associated with a timber building phase, possibly linked to the setting out of burgage plots around 1186. Associated with this timber building phase were an oven base and several hearths suggesting domestic occupation supported by quantities of typical domestic pottery forms. A stone building phase superseded the timber phase and may represent a rebuilding of the burgage plots during a period of increased affluence in Ludlow, possibly during the 14th century. The width of the stone walls uncovered would suggest impressive buildings one of which certainly had a full height cellar and another which may have had an apsidal end. These buildings would appear to have had mixed fortunes with some being superseded by later stone structures in the 16th century and others continuing in use until the early 17th century. The buildings probably had roofs made of stone slates capped off with glazed ceramic ridge tiles. The excavation revealed a series of timber and stone street frontages dating to the late 12th century, overlain by post medieval remains. Excavation report: Garner D, 1999.
- 4.4 In February 2007 an archaeological desk-based assessment (ESA6173) was undertaken at Station Drive, Ludlow in connection with proposals to redevelop the site (now an Aldi supermarket). The study area was then occupied by a coal yard and car and lorry park, but was formerly an area of railway sidings and yards of mid-19th century date, associated with the adjacent Ludlow Station (PRN 06119). The site lies immediately behind the former burgage plots (PRN 06185) of one of the town's medieval suburbs; however prior to the land being developed as railway siding, the study area was in agricultural usage in the form of orchards and pasture. It is likely that features associated with the former use of the

study area as railway sidings may survive beneath the present ground surface. There were no indications from this deskbased assessment that any evidence for earlier occupation or structures were likely to occur within the study area (which abutted the eastern end of the original Stone House plot) – (Hannaford, 2008).

- 4.5 Research into the history and development of the present “Stone House” building lay outside the scope of the present project. The building appears, however to have had an interesting sequence of development, being apparently the 18th C home of a reasonably prosperous manufacturer, much extended and largely rebuilt with a grand frontage during the mid 19th C. The name “Stone House” is intriguing (in a town with many stone buildings). There may be some tenuous connection with a reference to Stone House as the “*occasional residence of the Earl of Powis*” in Thomas Wright’s 1826 History of Ludlow (p 237), though that building was described as being 4 miles out of the town. The building appears to have remained a genteel residence into the early 20th C, the 1891 and 1901 Census having recorded the occupants as Mary Graves, a widow living on own means with her grown up but unmarried daughters, also of independant means. By 1901 they had been joined by a young grandson. There were two resident servants. A change in street numbering prior to 1891 makes the earlier occupants of the house more difficult to trace.

5 Results

- 5.1 The observed deposits were restricted to within a single “L” shaped trench, nominally 0.85m wide and 0.75m deep. Due to the undulating car-park surface there were some slight variations in trench depth, the base of the trench being essentially level.
- 5.2 The earliest deposits encountered were a slightly reddish light brown clay (Layer 5; Fig 4) present at the very base of the trench. The clay was encountered mainly on the eastern side of the trench immediately to the south of F1 (Fig 3) – the material was not fully exposed and therefore had no defined edges. It appeared to be fairly clean (without charcoal flecking etc) and might possibly represent natural subsoil, though this could not be demonstrated within the present excavated trench.
- 5.3 Two possible sections of vestigial stone wall foundation (F1 and F2) were observed crossing the eastern arm of the trench (Figs 3 and 5). Of the two the northernmost (F1) was the most convincing, consisting of several large flat stones directly overlying Layer 5, and in some places overlapped (Fig 5). The line of stones was a maximum of 0.7m wide, and apparently aligned at a right angle to Corve Street (similar to the rear part of Stone House). The surviving stonework was apparently less than 100mm deep, the top being 0.83m below the carpark surface (so at approximately 88.00mAOD according to the supplied survey plans). The stonework was not removed, so it was not certain that the foundation was any deeper, but there was no clear indication of a foundation cut. The possible foundation F2 was less well preserved, but apparently of similar character. It consisted of a linear patch of several smaller flat stones and a little lime mortar bedding. It was aligned as a continuation of the south wall of the rear wing of Stone House, but otherwise might be interpreted as a small patch of demolition rubble, or possibly a pathway.
- 5.4 The predominant material excavated from the trench was a layer (Layer 4) -averaging 0.35m deep, of mixed reddish grey brown friable clay loam, containing frequent charcoal flecks, occasional clay tobacco pipe stems and very occasional blue decorated white china, with occasional small animal bone. At the base of the layer were several fragments of stone roofing tile (Fig 5). The nature of the artefacts indicate a very late 18th or more probably early-mid 19th C date for this horizon.
- 5.5 In the southern arm of the trench there was a large amorphous patch of red clay and reddish marl intermixed with a little brick rubble (see Figs 3,4 and 5)). The patch was not fully exposed within the limits of the trench, but was approximately 2.4m across, and at least 0.15m deep. It lay within a cut that was clearly later than Layer 4, but that pre-dated the roadstone of the carpark (Layer 3). The patch of clay may represent a large backfilled feature which lies mostly to the south of the trench, or simply levelling up of the site prior to car-park construction. The nature of the red clay is reminiscent of the raw material of brick making, and it is possibly derived from one of the several nearby former brickyards which survived into the mid 20th C.
- 5.6 The trench was crossed by a number of service trenches of relatively recent date, the majority (of the 13

cables and ducts noted) appeared to be relatively shallow trenches for power and communications cables linking the various council offices on the site. The cables had been laid generally in a fairly adhoc manner, and one was so shallow that the kerbstone of the carpark had been notched around it. A deeper service trench crossing the corner of the site diagonally appeared to be the main power supply to the council offices as it gave a strong radio-magnetic response – its trench was deeper than the present excavation and the cable not exposed. These features were not recorded on the plan.

- 5.7 At higher level the trenched deposits all related to the present carpark, which had clearly been altered and resurfaced on at least one occasion. The eastern arm of the foundation trench corresponded closely with a former kerb line, and parts of the cast concrete kerb race remained in situ. The carpark construction consisted of 0.35m of roadstone overlaid by two layers of tarmac, the lower of which retained yellow “no parking” lines on its upper face. The original carpark surface appeared to date to the late 1970s or 1980s.
- 5.8 At the northern end of the trench part of a raised plant bed of re-used stone and concrete fragments in cement mortar was removed to facilitate the trenching. The soil within the plant-bed appeared to be imported topsoil of recent date, the bed overlying two earlier communication cables.

6 Discussion and conclusions

- 6.1 The small scale of the intervention restricted the probability of encountering archaeologically significant deposits, and therefore it is not unexpected that very little of archaeological interest was seen.
- 6.2 The upper 0.45-0.47m of the exposed deposits related to the present carpark and are of no archaeological interest. The deposits immediately below the carpark construction levels appear to represent principally a horizon of material deposited in the 19th C, quite possibly representing material raised from the excavation of foundations and cellars in the mid 19th C when the house was extensively re-modelled and extended. The area is presently somewhat raised (by about 0.3-0.35m) above the level of the garden to the north, and the internal floor levels of the earlier part of the main building, suggesting that there has been significant soil deposition since the 18th C. Beneath the “dumping” horizon was a fairly level area (comparable with internal floor levels within the house) demarked by two probable wall foundations. The wall foundations may represent either one or more outbuildings or walls enclosing an earlier rear yard. The presence of several stone tile fragments at the level to which the wall foundations had been robbed out may indicate that they were demolished at the same time as the main building was being re-roofed.
- 6.3 The absence of any residual medieval material on the site is a little surprising in view of the known proximity of medieval activity, but may indicate that any buried medieval soil horizons are rather deeper than the present shallow intervention.
- 6.4 The remaining tarmac and block-paved surfaces within the new garden area are due to be removed in due course, and the garden created with imported topsoil. It would appear on the basis of the present intervention that these works will have no impact on archaeologically significant horizons.

7 Bibliography

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8 **Acknowledgements**

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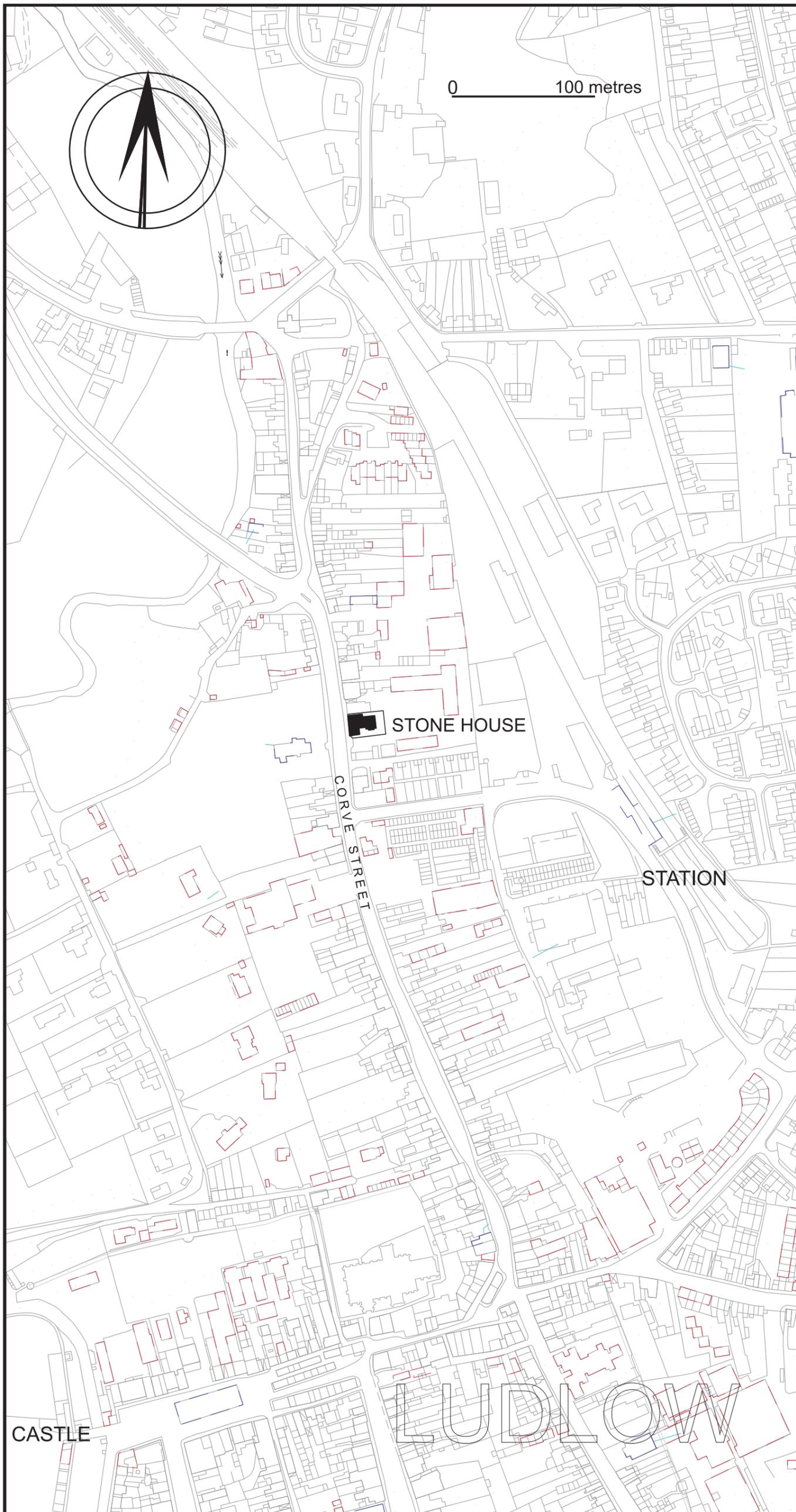


Figure 1: Site location plan



Figure 2: Site location overlaid on 1903 Ordnance Survey mapping

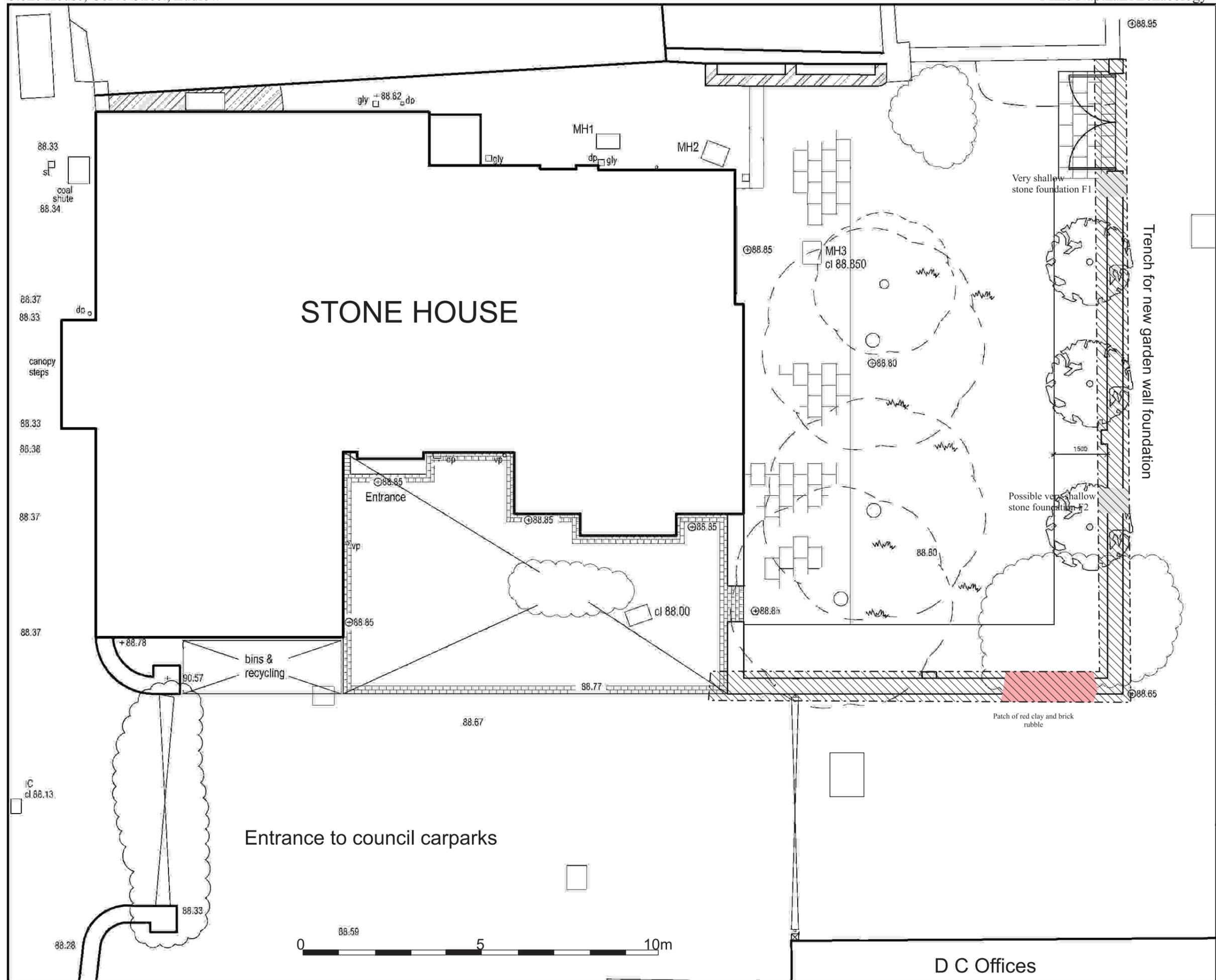


Figure 3: Site plan - excavated trench shown hatched



East side of north-west leg of trench - showing typical sequence of deposits - scale in 10cm divisions.



Patch of red clay, marl, soot and brick rubble on south side of east-west leg of trench - apparently of recent (mid 20th C) date

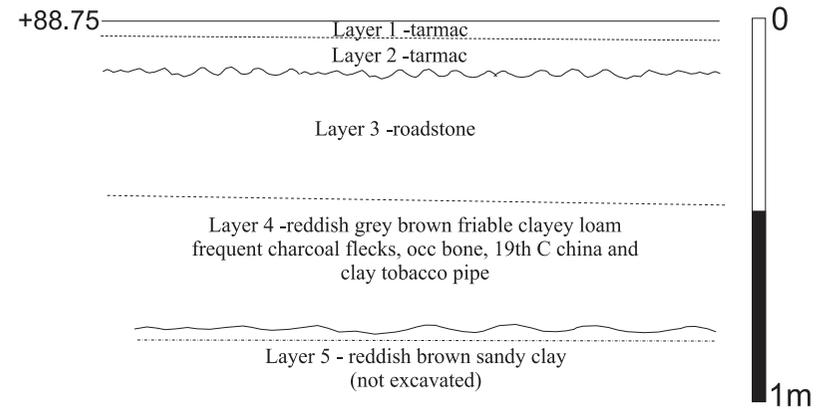


Figure 4: Representative trench sections



View facing south along trench



Possible stone foundation "F1" exposed in base of trench



Stone roof tiles from area between "F1" and "F2"



Possible shallow stone and mortar foundation "F2" partially exposed in base of trench



General view of near-completed trench, showing rear of "Stone House" from south-east

Figure 5: Site photographs