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LAND OFF QUEEN STREET AND
MEETING STREET, WEDNESBURY,
SANDWELL

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION, 2007

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



Project No. 1709

**Land off Queen Street and Meeting Street,
Wednesbury, Sandwell**

Site Ref. WSMS206

An Archaeological Evaluation, 2007

By

Mark Charles

For

Barratt Homes

For further information please contact:

Alex Jones (Director)
Birmingham Archaeology

The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston

Birmingham B15 2TT

Tel: 0121 414 5513

Fax: 0121 414 5516

E-Mail: bham-arch@bham.ac.uk

Web Address: <http://www.barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau>

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation of land off Queen Street and Meeting Street, Wednesbury, Sandwell (centred on NGR SO 9820 9580) was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in October 2007. The evaluation took place in advance of a proposed residential development and was sited to provide data concerning the development of Wednesbury from the medieval period to the present and, more specifically, to locate and record the remains of a Wesleyan Methodist chapel (SMR 13091) built in 1850 that stood on the site until the 1950s or 1960s.

Three trial-trenches were excavated. A residual Roman pottery sherd was recovered from a pit recorded in one trench close to Meeting Street. This suggested activity possibly relating to the Stretton to Metchley Roman road which is thought to pass through the locality. The pit also contained 17th century pottery, probably locally produced. The function of the pit is unknown, but it could be associated with crafts, industries or agricultural activities which may have been carried out on site, in an area which was probably outside the 17th century town boundary.

Alternatively it is perhaps possible that the pit could be evidence of back-plot activity relating to development along Meeting Street in the 17th century. The well preserved vaulted undercroft walls of the Methodist chapel were recorded in another trench which also confirmed the position and alignment of the structure.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the project

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Barratt Homes PLC to undertake a programme of trial trenching ahead of a residential development of land off Queen Street and Meeting Street, Wednesbury, Sandwell.

A planning application has been approved by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council for the redevelopment of land off Queen Street and Meeting Street involving the construction of 166 dwellings. As the proposed development site is of possible archaeological significance an archaeological evaluation was recommended by the Borough Archaeologist, Sandwell M.B.C. Due to the presence of standing buildings on the eastern part of the development site the evaluation of this part of the site could not be carried out. The area available for evaluation was therefore confined to the western part of the site and this written scheme of investigation applies only to this part of the site.

This report outlines the results of a field evaluation carried out between 15th-18th October 2007, and has been prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations (IFA 2001).

The evaluation conformed to a Written Scheme of Investigation, Birmingham Archaeology 2007; Appendix 1, which was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to implementation in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990).

1.2 Location and geology

The site is located on land off Queen Street and Meeting Street, and is centred on NGR SO 9820 9580 (Figs. 1 and 2, hereinafter referred to as the site).

The underlying geology consists of Upper Coal Measure with the overlying geology comprising grey clays with alluvial deposits (Geological Survey of Great Britain: Sheet 168).

The present character of the site is a mixture of open space, grassland and building materials storage. To the north of the site lies Meeting Street, and to the east Queen Street, now a cul-de-sac, runs south among recent residential development. The south the site is bounded by the Holyhead Road and the junction of Holyhead Road and Meeting Street is located to the west.

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The development area lies partly within an area of archaeological potential, defined by Sandwell MBC Unitary Development Plan (2004). The site is located close to the possible location of an Iron Age hill fort, Saxon burgh, and to the historic core of the medieval town. The suggested alignment of the Roman road from Metchley to Stretton could lie near the site. The church of St Bartholomew, which originated in the 14th century is located to the northeast of the site.

Recent archaeological work east of the site at Meeting Street (Coates 2006) revealed a substantial ditch, containing early post-medieval pottery. An archaeological evaluation and excavation undertaken to the southeast of the site, adjacent to Holyhead Road, revealed evidence of 16th/17th century pottery production, in the form of pits containing large quantities of waster sherds, close to the western edge of the post-medieval town. Traces of a pottery kiln, associated structures and several pits containing wasters were found. These were all situated on the eastern side of a large ditch running approximately north-south which had subsequently been used as a place to dump large amounts of pottery wasters (Pers. comm. M. Edgeworth).

The Tithe Map of 1844 (Fig. 5) shows that some areas of the site were occupied by housing fronting onto Holyhead Road, Meeting Street and Queen Street. Large parts of the site were still undeveloped at this time. A colliery was situated adjacent to the eastern side of the site. Fifty years later, by the time of the first edition OS map (Fig. 6), the site has been fully built-up, and was occupied by terraced housing, an iron and brass foundry and Methodist Chapel (SMR 13091) and School, probably constructed in 1850 (www.genuki.org.uk). The historic map regression shows that the site remained substantially unchanged until the 1960s (Fig. 7) when the chapel, school and housing fronting onto the Holyhead Road were probably demolished to make way for local authority housing.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of the evaluation was to determine the character, state of preservation and potential significance of any buried remains. In particular, it is intended to:

- Establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the nature, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains identified,
- provide data concerning the development of Wednesbury from the medieval period to the present,
- contribute to the broader appreciation of the development of the town

4.0 METHODOLOGY

A total of three trenches were dug at the western part of the site (Fig. 3).

All trench locations were agreed with the Borough Archaeologist. Although some limited re-location and truncation of trenches was required to avoid live services. Trenches dug to a greater depth than 1.2m below the modern surface were stepped for safety reasons.

All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a JCB excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the

top of the uppermost archaeological horizon or the subsoil. A toothed bucket was required to remove modern (eg demolition) deposits. Subsequent cleaning and excavation was by hand. A representative sample of archaeological features and deposits were manually sample excavated sufficiently to define their character and to obtain suitable dating evidence. Generally, 50% of pits or post-holes and a 1m section of linear/ curvilinear features were excavated. Archaeological deposits were not completely excavated. The depth of archaeological deposits across the site was assessed, although the full length of every trench was not necessarily excavated down to natural.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50, and sections were drawn of all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:10. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on *pro-forma* context and feature cards. Written records and scale plans were supplemented by photographs using monochrome and colour print and colour slide photography.

There were no contexts suitable for soil sampling for the recovery of charred plant remains. The environmental sampling policy followed the guidelines contained in the Birmingham Archaeology Guide to On-Site Environmental Sampling and the *Report of the Association for Environmental Archaeology Working Party on Sampling and Recovery*, September 1995. Recovered finds were cleaned, marked and remedial conservation work will be undertaken as necessary. Treatment of all finds will conform to guidance contained within 'A strategy for the care and investigation of finds' published by English Heritage.

The full site archive will include all artefactual and/or ecofactual remains recovered from the site. The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage, 1991), the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage (Walker 1990) and Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections (Museum and Art Galleries Commission, 1992). Finds and the paper archive will be deposited with Wednesbury Museum, subject to permission from the landowner.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Detailed summaries of individual trenches are presented in Appendix 2 and full details are available in the project archive.

5.2 Subsoil (natural)

In Trenches 1 and 2 the natural yellow-orange sandy clay subsoil was reached at heights of between 131.67 - 132.93m AOD. The natural subsoil was not reached in Trench 3.

5.3 Summary of archaeological features and deposits.

Trench 1: 20m x 1.5m aligned N-S

The natural subsoil (1001) (Plate 1) was cut by one feature, a sub-circular pit (1004), measuring 1.84m in diameter and 0.26m deep, filled by greyish yellow

clay (1003) containing a shred of abraded Roman pottery and sherds of post-medieval pottery and tile.

Trench 2: 17m x 1.5m aligned NW-SE.

The planned excavated extent of Trench 2 (Plate 2) was abbreviated due to the exposure of live service cables. For the health and safety of staff the trench was rapidly recorded and backfilled.

No archaeological features cut the natural subsoil (2000)

Trench 3: 12.5m x 1.5m aligned E-W

The planned excavated extent of Trench 3 was truncated due to the proximity of live service cables at both ends of the trench.

The well preserved cellar walls of an E-W aligned single phased brick-built structure (3002-3013) was located at depths of between of 1.10m-1.80m (Fig. 4, Plate 3). The remains included the footings of ground floor rooms (3006), basement steps (3003) (Plate 6) and a brick floor surface (3008). One of the cellar areas was excavated by machine to a brick floor surface (Plate 4), reached at a depth of 1m below the ground floor footings. The remains of brick vaulting were observed from the floor of the cellar amongst backfilled demolition debris within the north-facing section of the trench (Plate 5).

5.4 Overburden and topsoil

In Trench 1 the natural subsoil (1001) was overlain by a brick rubble demolition layer (1002) that varied in depth from 1.5m to the north of the trench to 0.60m to the south. The demolition layer was sealed by 0.10m of orange sand (1005) associated with the use of the area is a building materials store.

The natural subsoil (2000) in Trench 2 was overlain by brick rubble demolition debris (2001) measuring between 1.80m and 2.30m in depth, which was sealed by 0.15m of red sand (2002) associated with the use of the area as a building materials store.

In Trench 3 the remains of the E-W aligned cellar structure (3002-3014) were overlain by a 0.50m-1.50 deep layer of brick rubble demolition rubble (3001) which in turn was sealed by a 0.70m - 1.10m layer of re-deposited medium brown sandy silty loam topsoil (3000).

6.0 THE FINDS

6.1 The pottery by S. Ratkai

Pit Fill 1003, Trench 1

1 x iron-rich coarseware jar sherd with internal black glaze (probably 17th c)

1 x iron-poor coarseware, heavily abraded (probably 17th c)

Both the above sherds are almost certain to have been made in Wednesbury

1 x Roman Severn Valley ware sherd

Residual sherd.

7.0 DISCUSSION

The single residual Roman pottery sherd located in pit 1004 in Trench 1 suggests a possible association with activity relating to the Roman road from Stretton to Metchley, thought to be on an alignment passing through the locality. The pit itself is of probable 17th century date. The pit is of unknown function, but is located in an area which was probably outside the 17th century town boundary. It could be associated with crafts, industries or agricultural activities which may have been carried out on site. The site is in the area of Monway Field where clay extraction for pottery manufacture was carried out at this time (Ede 1962, 138). Alternatively it is perhaps possible that the pit could be evidence of back-plot activity relating to development along Meeting Street in the 17th century. Meeting Street was one of only fourteen known streets in 1801 (Ede 1962, 219). If there was some early development along Meeting Street it is likely that any traces of this, near the street frontage, have been removed by later housing.

The results from Trench 3 produced evidence of vaulted cellars or an extensive undercroft associated with the Wesleyan Methodist chapel built c1850 and demolished, probably as part of general slum clearance, in the 1950s or early 1960s. The evaluation also confirmed the position and alignment of the Methodist chapel. The need for any further archaeological investigation of the site will be the decision of the Borough Archaeologist.

8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Barratt Homes PLC. Thanks are due to Lee Perry and Nigel Joy for their co-operation and assistance throughout the project. Thanks also go to Graham Eyre-Morgan, who monitored the project on behalf of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. Work on site was supervised by Mark Charles and assisted by Paul Breeze, David Brown and Emily Hamilton. Thanks go to Stephanie Ratkai who identified the finds. Mark Charles produced the written report which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds, and edited by Laurence Jones who also managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

9.0 REFERENCES

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Internet Source:

www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/STS/Wednesbury/index.html#churchhistory
accessed 31/10/2007

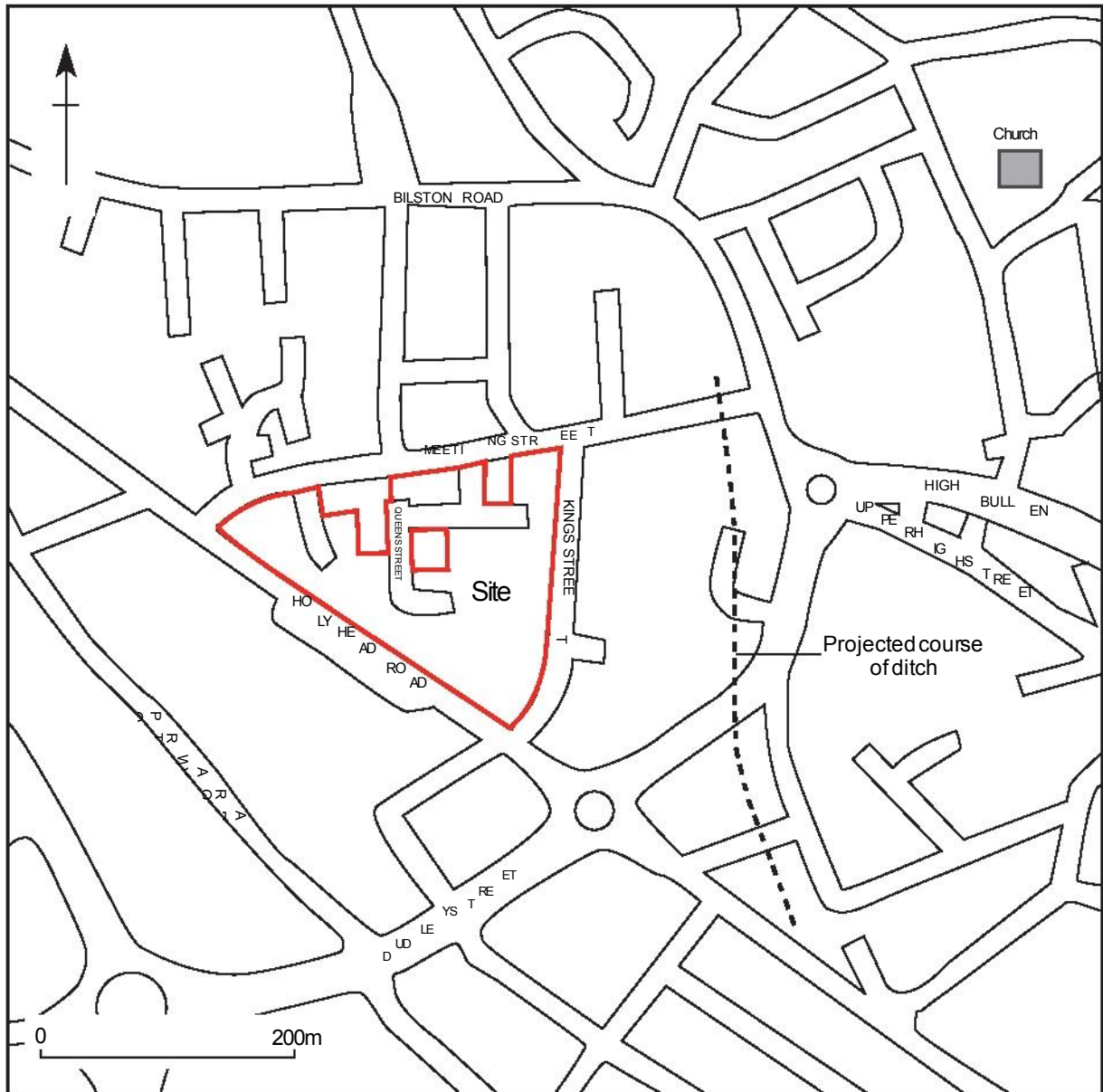


Fig.2

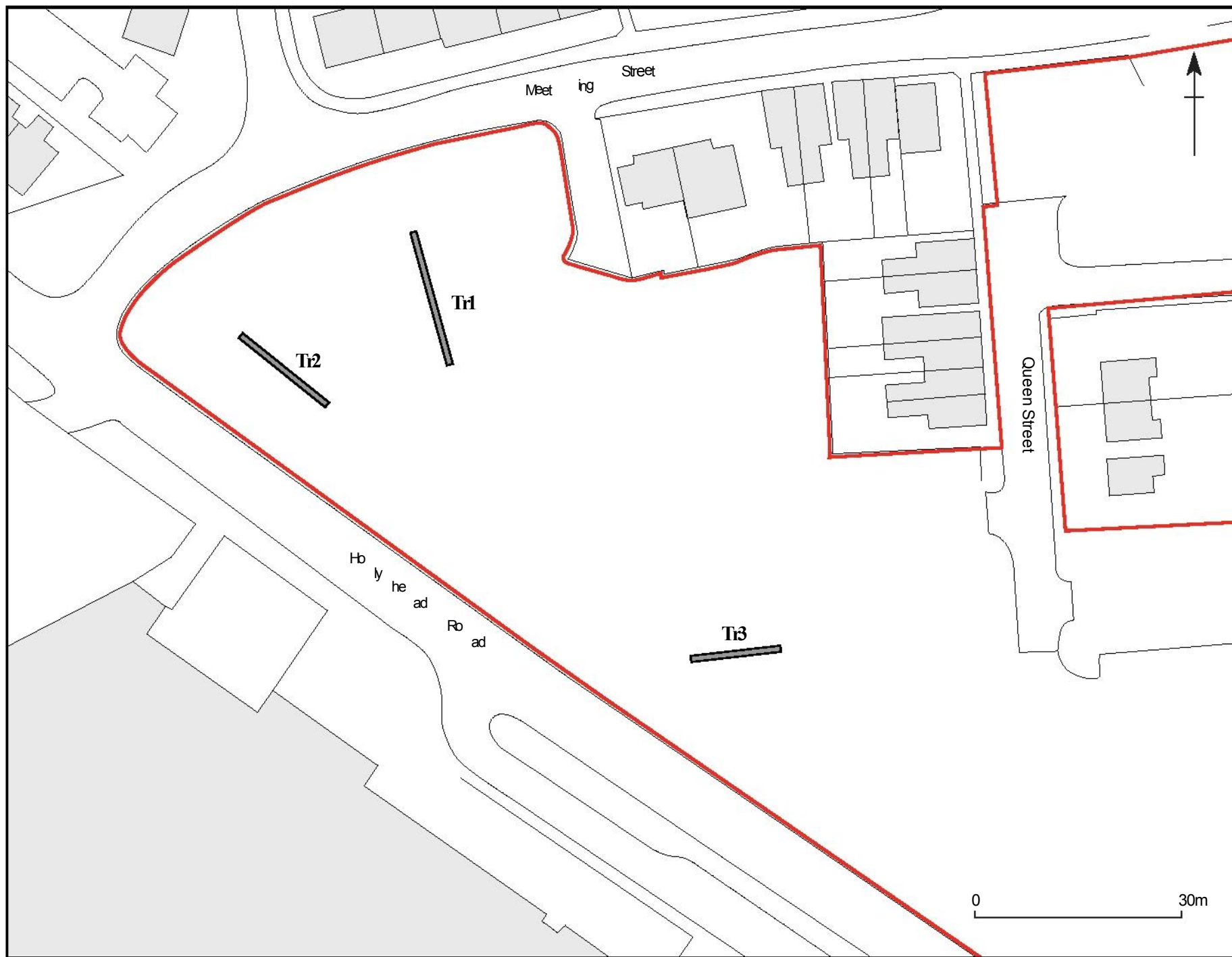


Fig.3

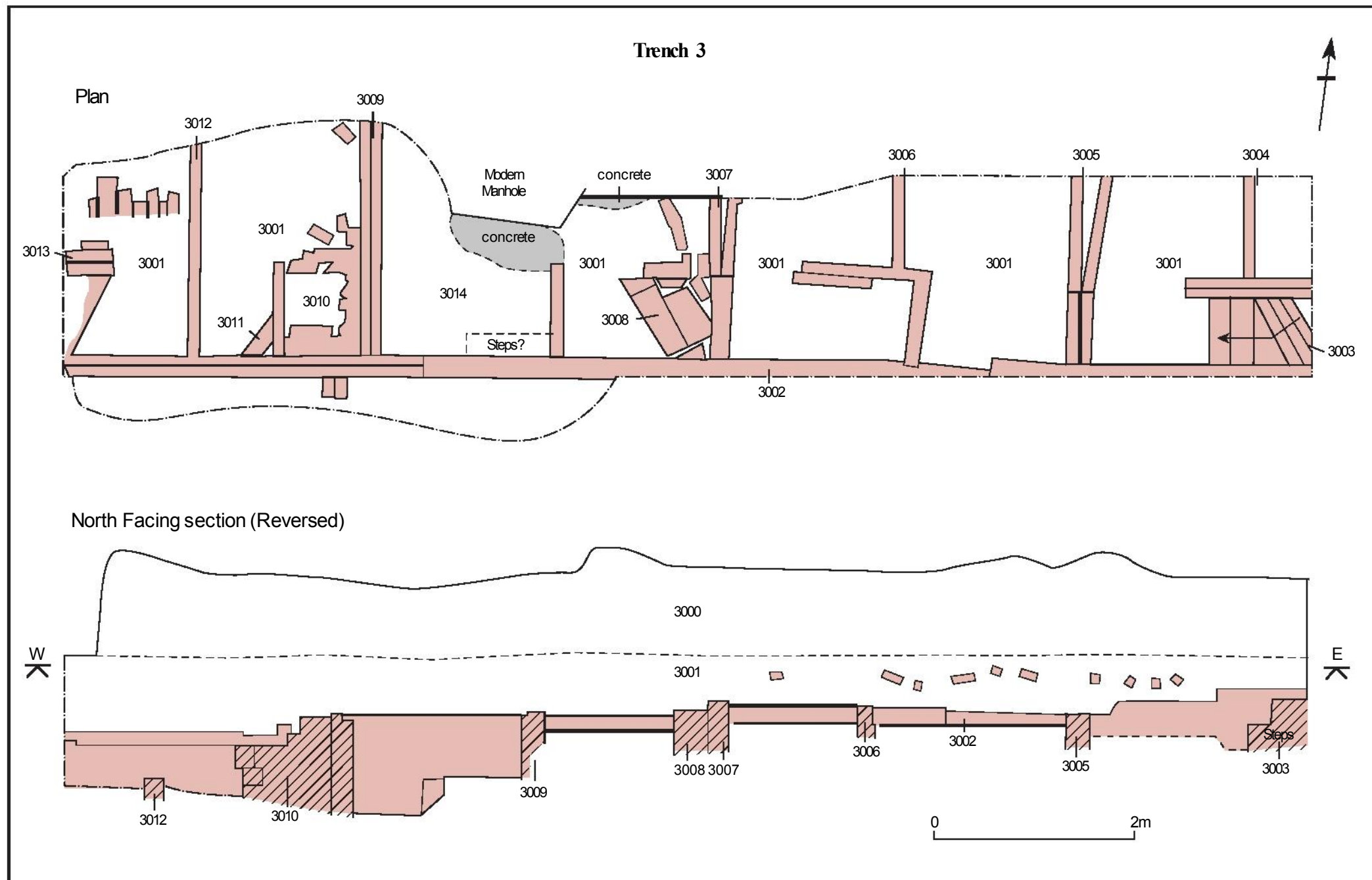


Fig.4

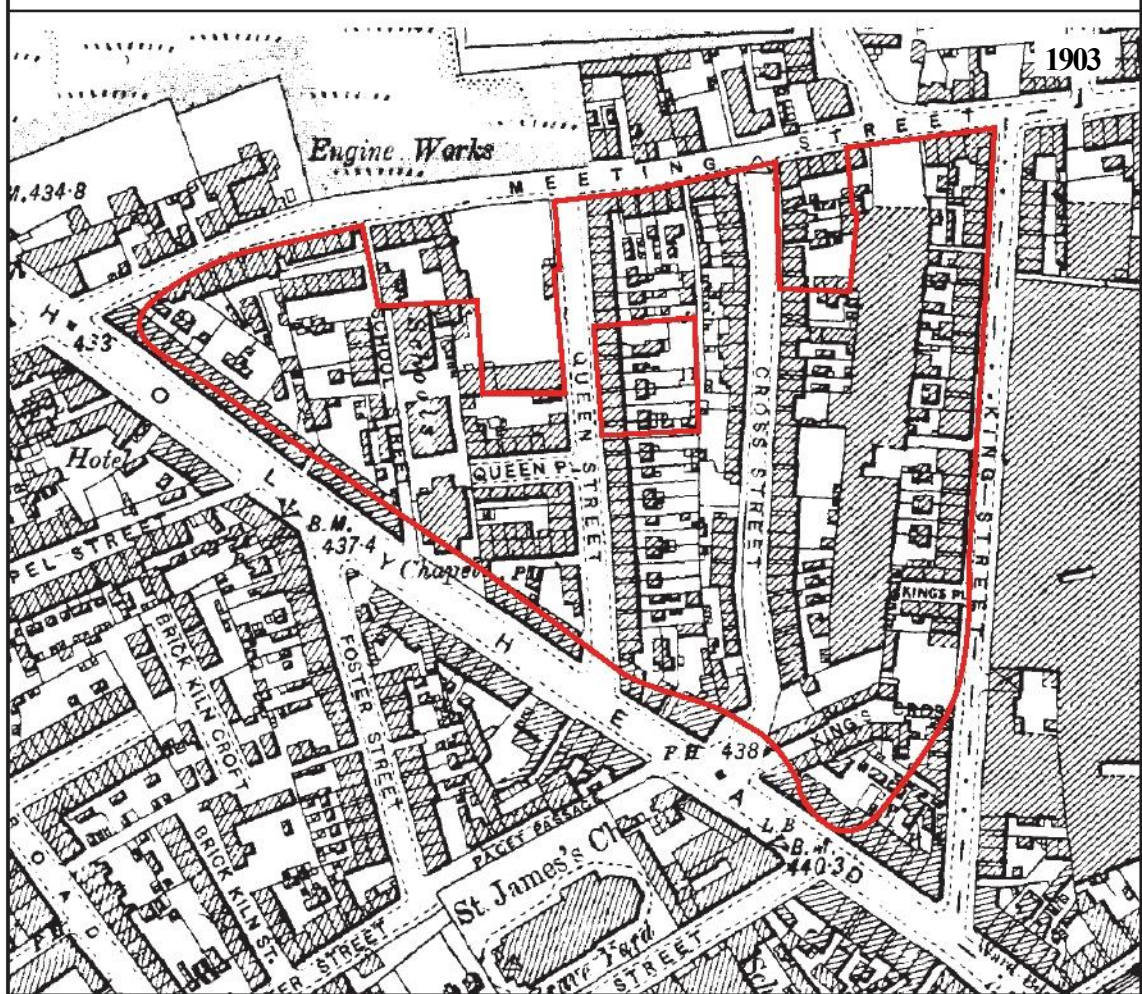
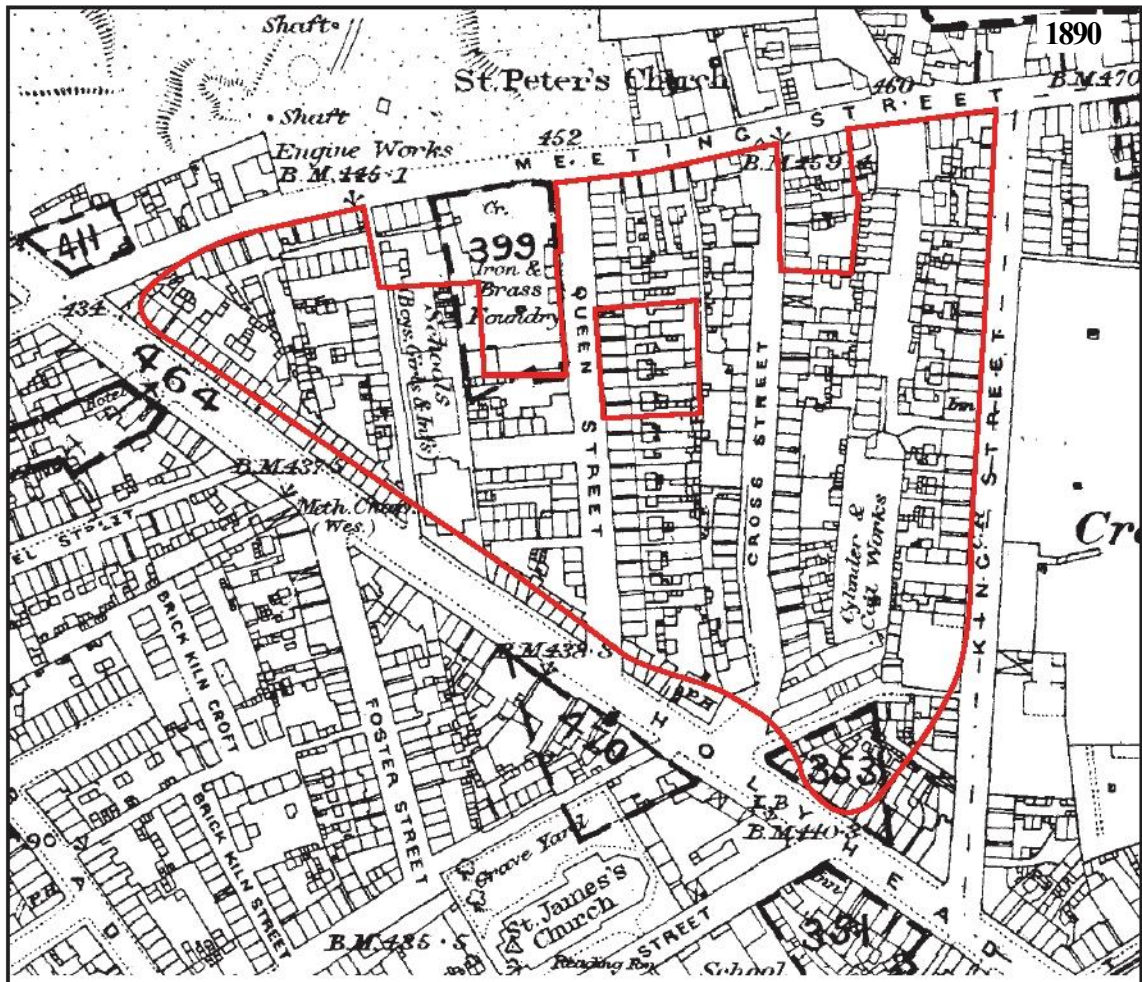


Fig6

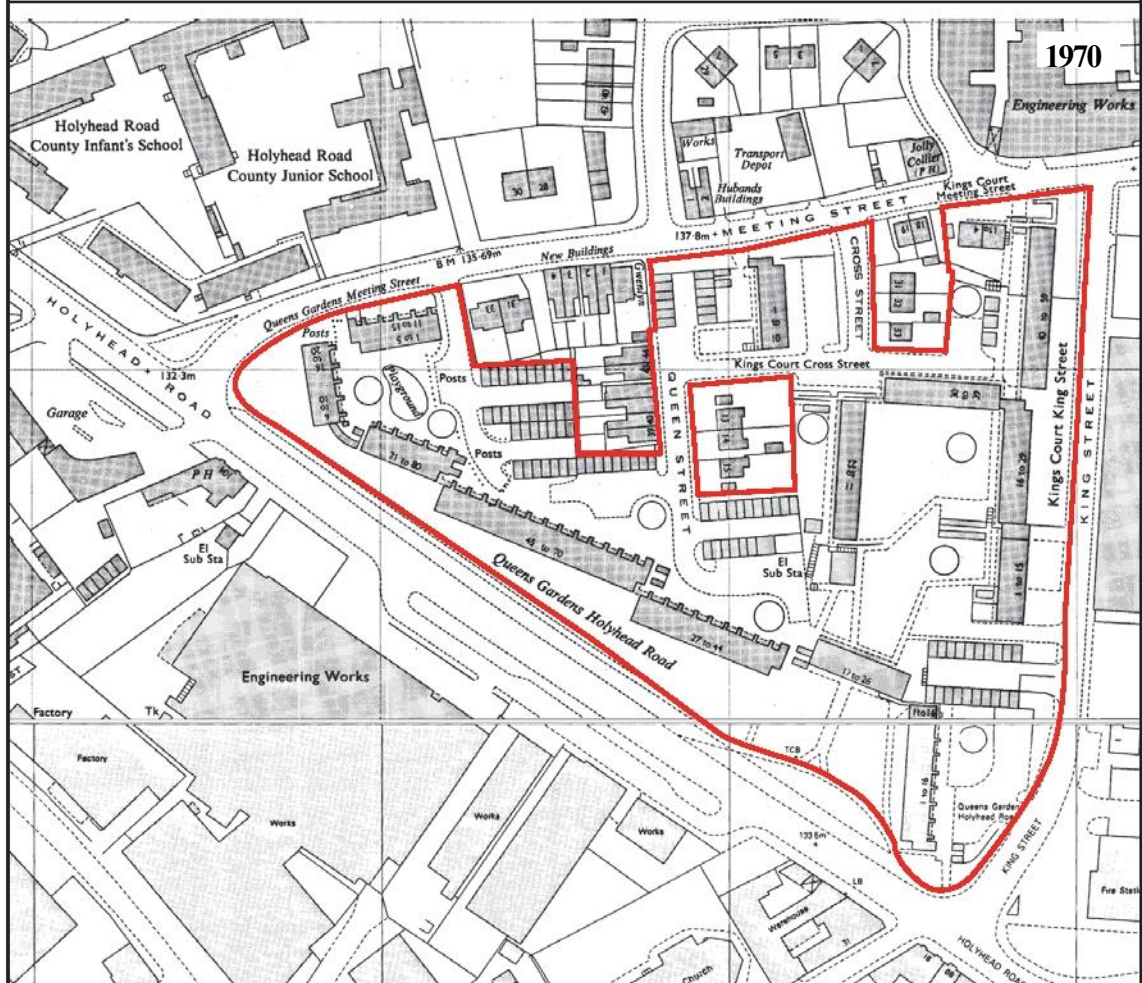
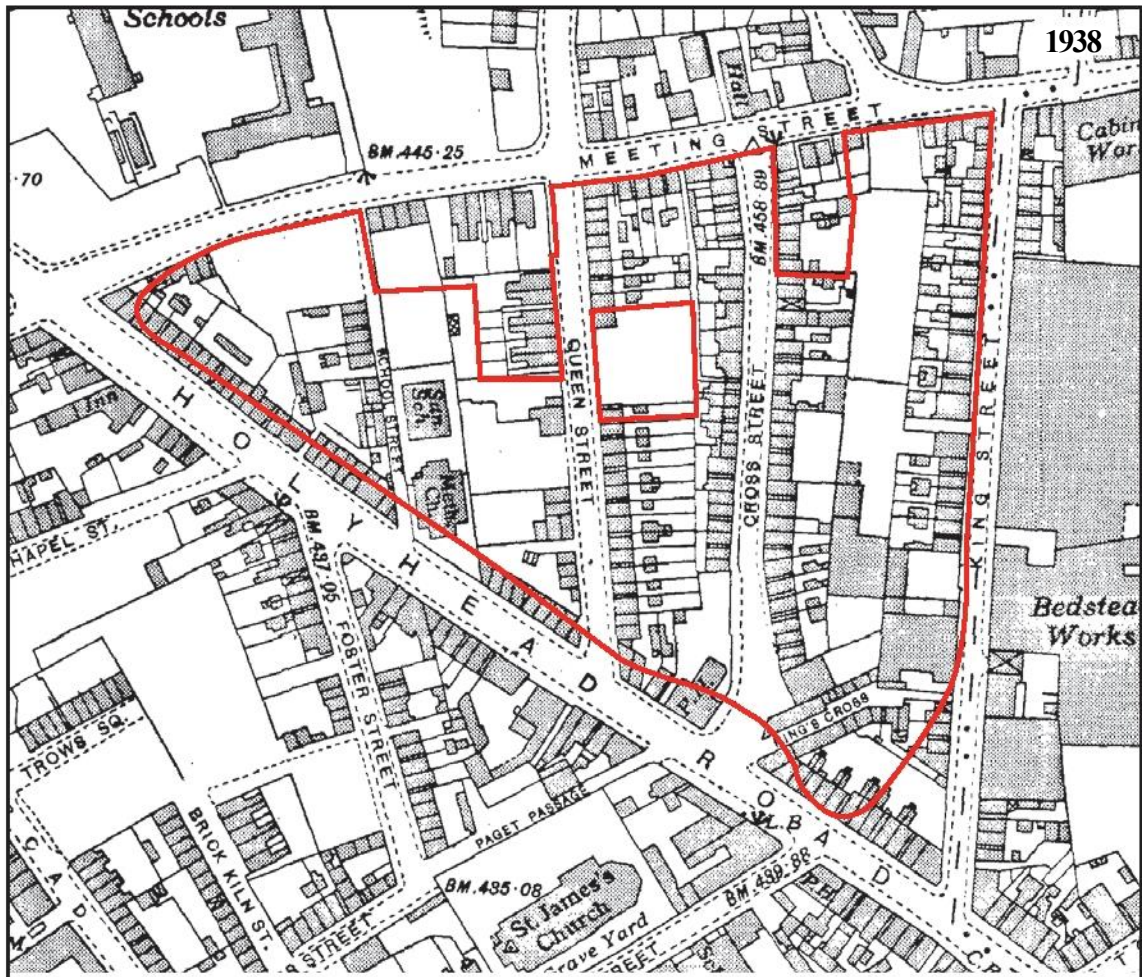


Fig.7



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6

Context Database

Area	Strat Unit Number	Description
T1	1001	Natural yellow-orange clay subsoil
T1	1002	Black/grey/orange snady silt demolition layer with brick, concrete, mortar and coal dust.
T1	1003	Light yellow/blue/orange clay with coal dust. Redeposited natural backfill.
T1	1004	Pit cutting natural backfilled with redeposited natural clay.
T1	1005	Red sand overburden
T2	2000	Natural yellow-orange clay subsoil
T2	2001	Red sand
T2	2002	Orange/black/yellow clayey sand with brick. Mix of demolition rubble and natural clay.
T3	3000	Med brown snady silt artificial surface. Redeposited natural.
T3	3001	Med brown/orange silty sand demolition layer with brick and mortar.
T3	3002	Orange brick. Long load bearing wall traversing entire trench.
T3	3003	Orange brick lower steps of spiral staircase.
T3	3004	Orange brick supporting structure for staircase.
T3	3005	Orange brick wall with offshoot structure. Possible vaulting structure.
T3	3006	Orange brick load bearing brick structure, internal cellar wall.
T3	3007	Pink red brick wall.
T3	3008	Pink red brick wall. Vaulting?
T3	3009	Orange/pink red brick cellar wall.
T3	3010	Orange red brick drain.
T3	3011	Pink red brick wall.
T3	3012	Orange red brick wall.
T3	3013	Orange red brick wall.
T3	3014	Orange brick cellar flooring. Unable to excavate or record due to health and safety factors.