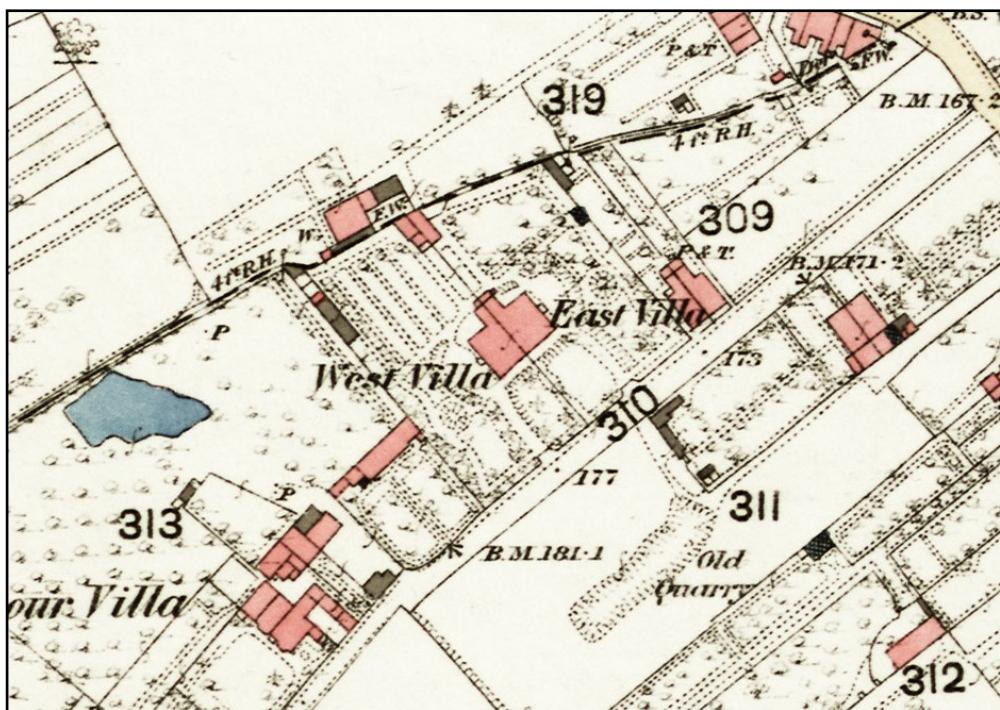


# Land at 29 Seymour Road, Bishopston, Bristol

## Report on Archaeological Watching Brief



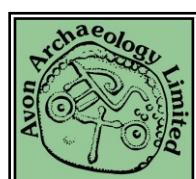
By Nick Corcos BA, MA, PhD, ACIfA

on behalf of

**Foley Allan Project and  
Construction Management**

**Avon Archaeology Limited**

Bristol: June 2016



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### Cover

Extract from First Edition OS 25" Gloucestershire Sheet 72.9, surveyed 1880/81, published 1883. The site lies within the boundary, and immediately to the north of, the house shown here as East Villa, which was semi-detached with its mirror image, the West Villa. Both houses still survive. The south-eastern corner of the original grounds of the East Villa is now occupied by modern houses fronting on to Seymour Road. The former ancient ecclesiastical parish boundary between Horfield (north) and Stapleton (south), shown as a dashed line, bounds the site on its northern side; by this date, it had been adopted as a Parliamentary Borough Boundary. Source: Bristol City Council KnowYourPlace online heritage resource.



## PLATES

1. Composite image, the site prior to excavation
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9. Detail of plinth, northern boundary wall
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## ABSTRACT

*Avon Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Mr Donald Foley, of Foley Allan, Project and Construction Management, Bristol, to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks associated with the construction of a small development of new residential houses on land behind 29 Seymour Road, Bishopston, Bristol. The work involved the archaeological monitoring of the majority of the house foundation trenches that were being excavated on the site. Apart from the discovery of a large, masonry culvert, almost certainly of 19<sup>th</sup> century date, running across the site, the work failed to reveal any features, structures or deposits of any archaeological significance or interest whatsoever.*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Avon Archaeology Limited wishes to acknowledge the assistance given by Mr Peter Allan, of Foley Allan, and the small team of on-site ground staff from Capstan Contractors, of Avonmouth, Bristol, who extended every courtesy, kindness and forbearance during the course of the work.

## NOTES

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAL	Avon Archaeology Ltd
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
BRO	Bristol Record Office



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Mr Donald Foley, of Foley Allan, to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks related to the development of three new residential dwellings on land behind 29 Seymour Road, Bishopston, Bristol. The development relates to Bristol City Council Planning Reference 15/05230/F. The site centre is located at OS NGR ST 59512 75948, and it lies on the northern side of Seymour Road, just over 100m to the south-west of its junction with Ashley Down Road. The site once formed, in part, the garden belonging to no. 29, but also incorporates land belonging to other, adjacent properties as well, specifically the two properties (a pair of semi-detached houses) immediately to the north-east of no. 29, numbers 29a and 29b Seymour Road. The work itself, which involved the monitoring of the main foundation trenches for the new houses, took place over the course of three days in May, 2016.

The methodologies for the watching brief itself had previously been outlined in a WSI produced by Bristol and West Archaeological Services Limited, for and on behalf of both the developer, and the conditioning local authority, which was Bristol City Council. That document highlighted, albeit rather briefly, the wider historical and archaeological context of the project. We will not, therefore, dwell on those aspects at length here (B&WAS 2015). However, independently of the WSI, the fieldwork was carried out in accordance with guidelines for Watching Brief projects issued by The Chartered Institute for Archaeology (ClfA 2014), the guidelines for archaeological projects set out in MoRPHE 2015, and the standard procedures of Avon Archaeology Limited. The WSI noted that, although no archaeological work, of any kind, had previously taken place on, or involved, the site in any way, the rear boundary wall of the site, running west-south-west/east-north-east, marked the line of the boundary between the historic parishes of Stapleton, to the south, and Horfield, to the north. The WSI infers from this that the wall *itself* “is therefore of some antiquity”, but since the boundary is probably *at least* of late Anglo-Saxon origin, this is an unwarranted assumption. Indeed it is unlikely that the wall as presently constructed is any earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century in date.

A digital photographic record was made as the work progressed, and a sample of those images is presented here as **Plates 1 to 10**. The captions attached to the plates will, it is hoped, be fairly self-explanatory.



## 2 GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site is underlain by strata of the Rugby Limestone, a series of interbedded limestones and mudstones laid down in the early Jurassic. These deposits represent an element of the Blue Lias Formation, and in terms of their physical characteristics are described by BGS as alternating grey, argillaceous limestones and mudstones (BGS).

On the site these strata manifested themselves in the form of alternating bands of heavy, stiff clays, and hard, mid-grey, jointed limestones, with the latter bearing a striking resemblance to well-laid flagstone paving when exposed by excavation, and provided an extremely stable and convenient base for concrete-pouring following the digging of the foundation trenches (**Plates 2, 3, 7, 8**).

## 3 METHODOLOGY

Trenches were numbered as they were excavated. Of the total of 18 trenches that were required to complete the work, 14 were monitored in full before it was decided that the entirely negative results up to that point did not justify monitoring of the remaining four trenches, all of which were, anyway, relatively short (**Figure 3**). A trench running parallel to, and at the foot of the side wall of the site (ie running north-west/south-east) was not separately numbered as it was relatively shallow, and only just clipped the top of the natural along most of its length (**Plate 6**).

Trenching was carried out using a grading bucket of 0.60m width, on a tracked, 360° mechanical excavator. It became clear early on in the work that there was a level layer of hard limestone running across the site, at slightly varying depths, and in most of the trenches excavated, this limestone ‘pavement’ formed the base. Prior to excavation work, the site had undergone some reduction to remove turf and the upper part of the topsoil, but across the main part of the site, the latter had not been completely removed. From a topographical survey that was carried out prior to the development, it is likely that the stripped ground level of the site immediately prior to excavation centred on values around 53m aOD.

## 4 THE MONITORING

All of the trenches that were monitored showed pretty much the same straightforward sequence of deposits, with around 0.40-0.045m of topsoil, 0.34-0.40m of a mid greenish-brown, friable, silty clay subsoil, with occasional flecks of charcoal, and thence down to the trench bases, a



sequence of natural, stiff, sticky clays varying in colour from light buff to mid greenish brown. The deepest excavation was achieved in Trench 5, on the eastern side of the site, at about 1.5m below the stripped ground level. The depth at which the natural limestone pavement already mentioned was struck, varied slightly across the different trenches, and it is possible that rather than being dead level, it was actually dipping slightly, possibly to the east, since it was encountered at rather shallower depths in the western side of the site, eg at about 0.60 m below stripped ground level in Trench 14.

From the entire monitoring work, there was a single feature of potential archaeological interest, and this was a large, masonry culvert, which by chance was found running virtually down the centre line of Trench 4 (ie east-west), on the eastern side of the site. The south wall of the culvert also formed part of the southern section of the trench itself. The culvert was a fairly large structure, with parallel supporting walls of mortared, but undressed rubble masonry, supporting capping stones made of roughly-dressed Pennant flags, of about 0.07m thickness. The *internal* width of the culvert was 0.32m, and its depth, measured from the base of the capstones, was 0.45m. The supporting walls and flags were both bonded with a dirty, grey, friable, speckly mortar, probably indicating pretty firmly a 19<sup>th</sup> century date (**Plates 4 and 5**). The top of the culvert capstones lay at about 0.50m below the stripped ground level in that part of the site. It was possible to determine that the culvert ran *underneath* the main north-south boundary wall on the eastern side of the site, the weight of the wall being taken by a massive Pennant lintel stone. It is *possible* that the culvert was punched through the pre-existing wall, but this would have entailed deconstructing part of the wall's foundation course, a difficult task, and it seems rather more likely that it was always part of the wall structure and therefore contemporary with it.

The fill of the culvert was a very friable to loose, gritty, dirty, dark brownish-grey silt, with moderate to frequent small sub-angular stones. The trench was over 1.2m in depth and so it was only possible to take basic measurements. It was impossible to see any construction cut for the culvert, but it is likely that a cut must have originally been made for it. It was also difficult to see from which level this putative cut would have been made, but it looked as though it had at least been taken through the subsoil layer. There is no indication of this culvert on either the 1840s tithe maps or the early 1880s First Edition OS map, both on the local authority's *KnowYourPlace* online heritage resource; but it is most likely that it served at least the two large, surviving pre-tithe semi-detached houses known as East and West Villas, the East Villa now being 29 Seymour Road, and the West Villa, Flats 1-4 of Horfield Court, at 27 Seymour Road. Aside from the obvious fact that it was designed to take flowing liquid, it is unclear whether it carried a fresh water supply or was a drain for sewerage and/or waste/overflow water; although that said, the fill did not have the appearance of a typical cess deposit. There is a gentle downward gradient to the east here, so presumably that was the direction of flow.

In terms of finds, both topsoil and subsoil produced a small assemblage of transfer printed blue and white ware, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century creamware, clay tobacco pipe stems, and machine-made glass, and CBM. None of the material was particularly informative and in the part of the site that was monitored, there did not appear to be anything earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The material was examined and discarded on site.

### The Boundary Walls

Where possible, the opportunity was taken to examine the two historic boundary walls encompassing the site on the northern and eastern sides. The walls were constructed of uncoursed, undressed limestone rubble, with a capping of roughly dressed, flat Pennant coping stones. It was clear that, where the relationship could be seen, the wall had been built directly on top of the natural limestone pavement (eg **Plate 8**). From the top of the wall to the base of its lowest course, as far as this could be seen, was some 3.20m, of which 1.50m or thereabouts had been below the original ground level of the site, indicated by a soil mark running all around its base (**Plates 1 and 6**). Just over 2m from the top of the wall, a slight ledge or plinth stepped outwards about 0.10m, and from that point, it was just under a further 1m to the base of the wall, although it should be noted that the plinth sometimes disappeared into the body of the wall, so that in places the wall appeared to be of a single width throughout its entire height, eg at the eastern end of Trench 2. The two walls are, in any case, clearly of a single build. In the footing courses, the bonding used was a hard, speckly, dirty grey mortar, slightly different to that in the culvert in Trench 4, but again, most likely to be of 19<sup>th</sup> century date. Where it was possible to see the relationship between the natural and the wall, there was no clear construction cut, and the mortar in the lower courses appeared 'squidged out' into the natural. This may suggest that the wall foundation was constructed by making a vertical cut into the natural clay, and then 'backing' one side of the wall into it. The main body of the wall was then constructed on top of the footing. The mortar used in the above-ground part of the wall was very different to that used in the footing, being hard, coarse, light creamy-grey in colour, quite friable, and with moderate flecks of charcoal. The reason for the difference is unclear, but it may well suggest building phases which although technically separate, were in fact differentiated by only weeks or even days. It may, though, also be that a different mortar was used in the below ground section of the walls simply for technical reasons. It is also unclear whether it was these actual walls which were depicted as the property boundaries here on the tithe maps of the 1840s. It is also worth noting that the current ground level on the eastern side of the north/south stretch of the boundary wall, ie that relating to what is now no. 31 Seymour Road, is considerably lower than the *original* ground level on the site – on the eastern side from the top of the wall to ground level was a height of 3.30m; on the site, the same height was 1.90m, a difference of some 1.40m. The reason for this was unclear, and of course, unfortunately, the eastern side of the wall could not be examined. In theory this would mean that the very base of the wall footing on the eastern

side would have been not much, if at all, below the modern ground level, with implications for the overall stability of the wall, but this is speculation, and could not be confirmed.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief reported here was carried out in fulfilment of a pre-existing WSI produced by Bristol and West Archaeological Services. With the sole exception of a probably 19<sup>th</sup> century culvert, the results of the work were entirely negative, and at no point did it prove possible to identify any features, deposits or structures of any archaeological interest. For that reason, monitoring was curtailed after 14 of the total of 18 foundation trenches had been excavated.



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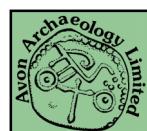


Figure 1

## Location of the Study Area

The Study Area



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Scale: 1:25,000

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Figure 2

## Site Location Plan

Source: Bristol City Council, KnowYourPlace

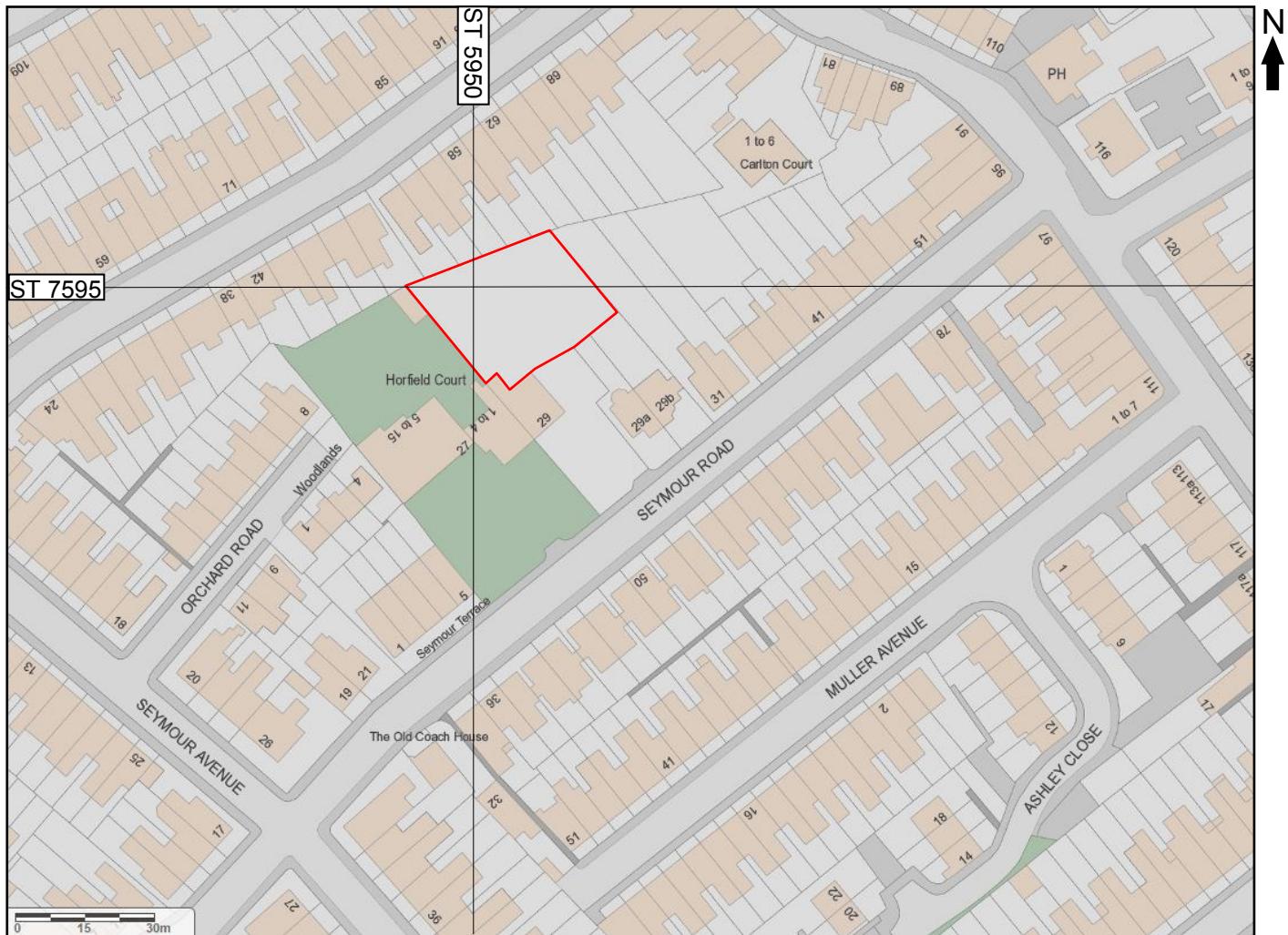
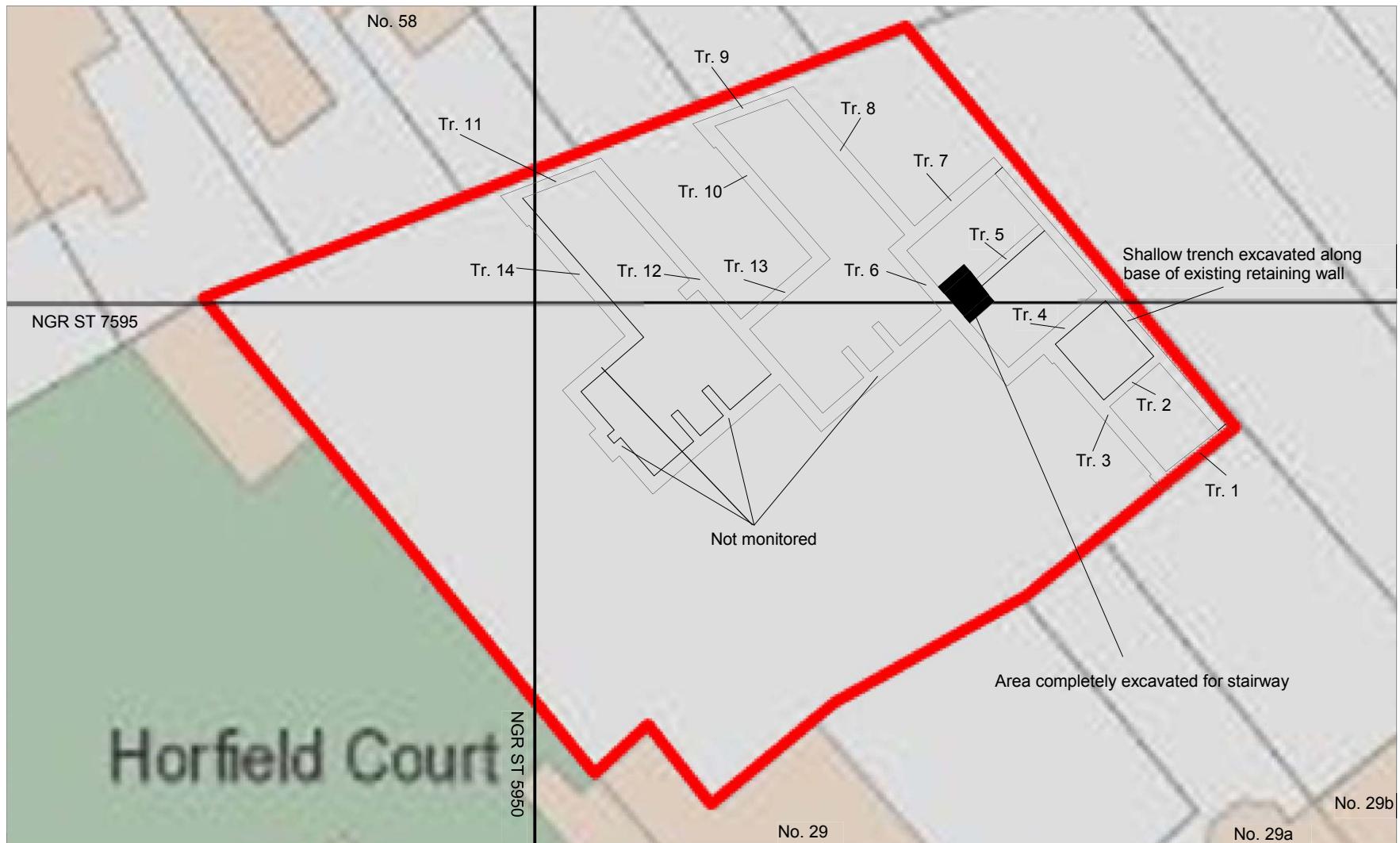


Figure 3

Trench Location Plan



# PLATES

Land at 29 Seymour Road, Bishopston, Bristol  
Report on Archaeological Watching Brief



1. Composite panoramic view of the site immediately prior to the commencement of excavation. The view pans round from north-west (left-hand side of frame) to north-east (right-hand side of frame). Note that the original ground level of the topsoil on the site, prior to a slight ground reduction, is indicated by the soil mark running all the way round the base of the historic boundary wall.



2. The typical sequence throughout the site, here seen in a north-facing section in Trench 1. Dark topsoil, mid grey-brown subsoil, and then natural clays of varying colour. Scale: 1m.



3. South-facing section in Trench 2, showing natural, level limestone 'pavement' at base of trench. Scale: 1m.



4. View of masonry culvert following exactly the line of Trench 4, running east-west. View to east, with eastern boundary wall in the background. Note capping slabs and supporting side walls, the latter with grey mortar. Scale: 1m.



5. View to east at the eastern end of Trench 4, showing culvert passing underneath the site's eastern boundary wall. Note massive lintel slab to support the weight of the wall on top of the culvert. Scale: 1m.



6. The shallow, unnumbered trench running parallel with the eastern boundary wall. View to north. Note the mark on the wall indicating original topsoil level on the site.



7. The sequence of deposits in the south-facing section of the stairwell trench. Scale: 1m.



8. View to west at the north-western end of Trench 9, with the northern boundary wall on the right, resting on natural limestone 'pavement'. There does not appear to be any construction cut through the section of natural clay facing the camera. Note the 'squidged out' appearance of the mortar in the wall footing (see text).



9. View to west along Trench 9, showing slightly stepped out footing of northern boundary wall, on right.



10. Composite panoramic view of site with Trenches 1-14 completed, and concrete already poured in Trenches 1-7. Same viewpoint as for Plate 1.