

Archaeological Watching Brief

Victoria House, 84 West North Street, Aberdeen



Garden area to rear of Victoria House, 84 West North Street, Aberdeen



30th June 2010

Introduction (Illus 1)

This archaeological watching brief on two engineers test pits was carried out for Aberdeen City Council to satisfy the outstanding archaeological condition on the planning consent for the redevelopment of this site. It was undertaken by the author on Monday 28th June (site code AB01); weather conditions were warm and sunny.

Archaeological Background

West North Street lies in an area of Aberdeen where there has been little opportunity for either archaeological excavation or observation. Previous monitoring of contractors foundation trenches at 56-58 West North Street had suggested that this area, which is low lying in relation to the rising ground of Gallowgate to the west, might have been marshland in the medieval period (Stones 1982, 109).

Watching Brief on test pits (Illus 2, 3)

Test Pit 1 (Illus 3 and 5)

This test pit was opened on the northern side of the garden area to the rear of Victoria House, it measured 1.35m N to S and was 0.40m wide. The trench was dug to a maximum depth of 1.8m below current ground level which was the limit of the mini-excavators arm. Dark brown topsoil (1) was encountered to a depth of 0.40m overlying a dump of stone rubble and mortar (2) which extended to 0.90m below ground level. The rubble and mortar overlay a deposit of light brown silty clay and occasional stones (3) which was encountered to the bottom of the trench at 1.8m. There was no sign of a natural subsoil horizon.

Test Pit 2 (Illus 4, 6 and 7)

This test pit was opened to the south of test pit 1 and measured 1.7m by 0.40m. This trench was dug to a maximum depth of 1.7m below modern ground level. Dark brown topsoil (4) was encountered to a depth of 0.20m overlying a deposit of stone rubble and sandy clay (5) to a depth of 0.60m. The rubble and sandy clay overlay a deposit of ash, crushed mortar and stone (6) to a depth of 0.80m. The rubble and sandy clay overlay a deposit of dark grey brown silty clay with occasional stones (7) to a depth of 1.70m. The deposit of silty clay overlay a lime mortar bonded stone structure (8) which filled the entire trench.

Finds (Illus 8)

Context 3 in Test Pit 1 produced a neck and dimpled base from a glass bottle and a clay pipe stem with a narrow bore. Both the glass and clay pipe are of a late 18th or early 19th century date.

Conclusions

It is clear from both test pits that the garden area to the rear of Victoria House has been artificially raised at some point in the past using a dump of rubble and mortar fragments (context 2 in Trench 1 and contexts 5 and 6 in Trench 2). This suggests that the deep deposits of silty clay (context 3 in Trench 1 and context 7 in Trench 2) encountered could be regarded as representing original ground surfaces on which the levelling material has been dumped on. There were very few finds from either

of the silty clays (context 3 in Trench 1, context 7 in Trench 2) but the bottle glass and clay pipe fragment from trench 1 suggest a Post Medieval date for those horizons (late 18th / early 19th century). The mortar bonded stonework encountered at 1.7m below modern ground level in Trench 2 is difficult to interpret but could potentially be of a medieval or post medieval date.

Recommendations

There is a considerable depth of deposit to the rear of Victoria House which seals structural remains which could potentially be of a medieval or post medieval date.

Depending on the development proposals and the foundation design of the proposed new build on this site there may be a need for further archaeological work prior to any proposed redevelopment, the final decision however rests with the Aberdeen City Council archaeologist.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Alastair Mitchell of Bam Nuttall and the machine driver for their help in undertaking this evaluation.

Reference

Stones, J 1982 '56-58 West North Street/Mealmarket Street 1979', in Murray, J C *Excavations in the medieval burgh of Aberdeen 1973-81*, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph No.2 Edinburgh, 109

Illustration List

Illus 1 Site Location (red dot) (based on Ordnance Survey map Crown Copyright 2010. All Rights Reserved. Licence number 100049628)

Illus 2 Location of evaluation trenches Scale 1:250 (solid triangles indicate locations of drawn sections)

Illus 3 West facing section of Test Pit 1 Scale 1:20

Illus 4 North facing section of Test Pit 2 Scale 1:20

Illus 5 Test Pit 1 looking South

Illus 6 Test Pit 2 looking South West

Illus 7 Mortar bonded stonework visible at base of Test Pit 2

Illus 8 Neck and base from glass bottle and clay pipe stem from context 3 in Test Pit 1

Discovery & Excavation in Scotland Entry

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Aberdeen City
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Victoria House, 84 West North Street, Aberdeen
PROJECT CODE:	AB01
PARISH:	Aberdeen
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR(S):	Derek Hall
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Derek Hall, archaeologist and ceramic specialist
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Archaeological Watching Brief
NMRS NO(S):	None
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	None
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NJ 941 069
START DATE	28 th June 2010
END DATE	28 th June 2010
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)	None
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	A watching brief was carried out on two engineers test pits to the rear of Victoria House. Both pits encountered a dumped rubble horizon which sealed deep deposits of silty clay which contained post medieval bottle glass and clay pipe. A mortar bonded stone structure of uncertain date was encountered at the base of trench 2 at a depth of 1.7m below modern ground level.
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	Unknown
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Aberdeen City Council
CAPTIONS FOR ILLUSTRS	N/A
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	34 Glenfarg Terrace, Perth, PH2 0AP
ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended)	NMRS
EMAIL ADDRESS:	Derek.hall1@blueyonder.co.uk

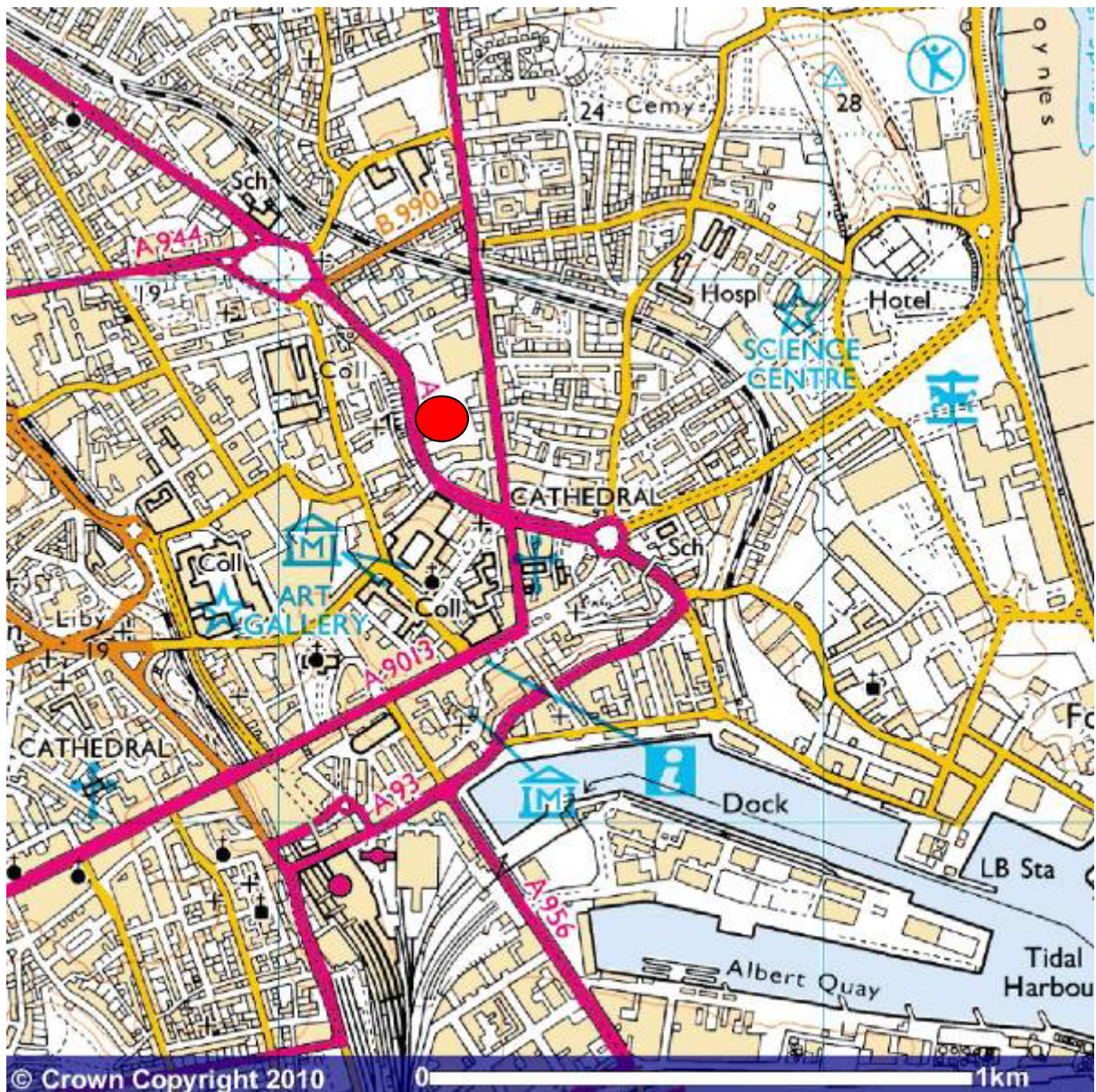


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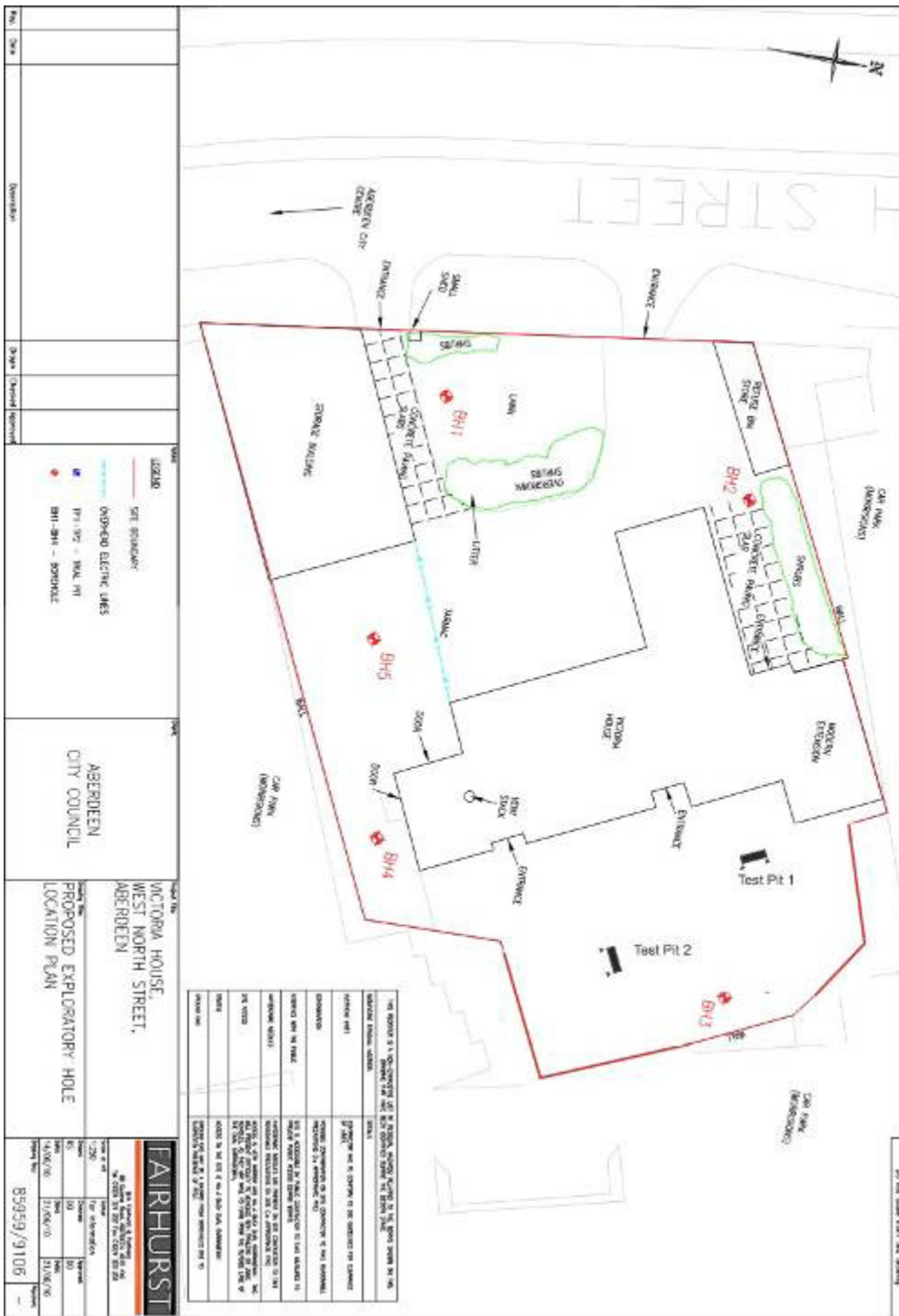


Illustration 2 Location of evaluation trenches Scale 1:300 (solid triangles indicate locations of drawn Sections) (based on supplied engineers trench location plan)

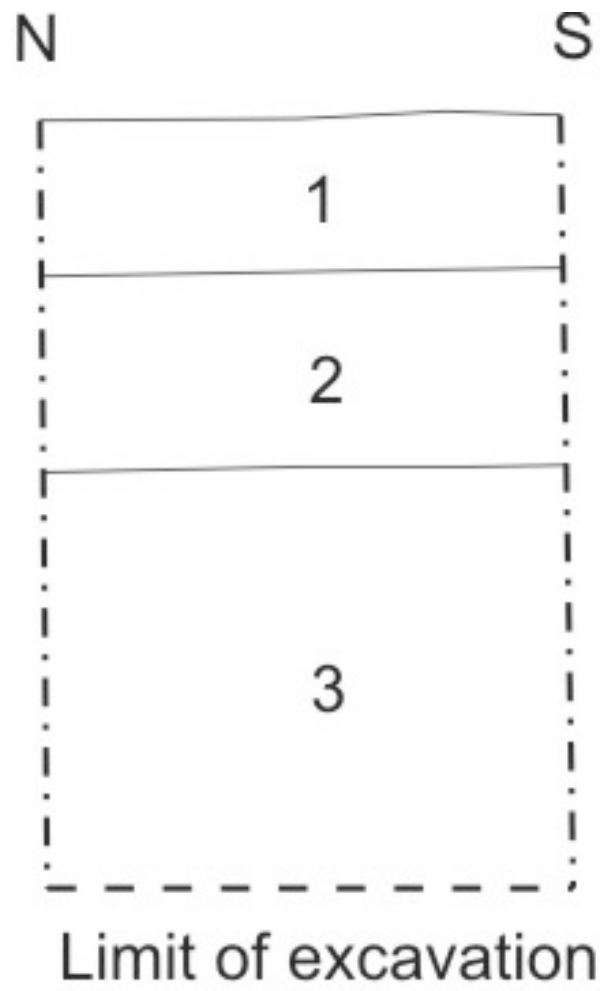


Illustration 3 West facing section of Test Pit 1 Scale 1:20

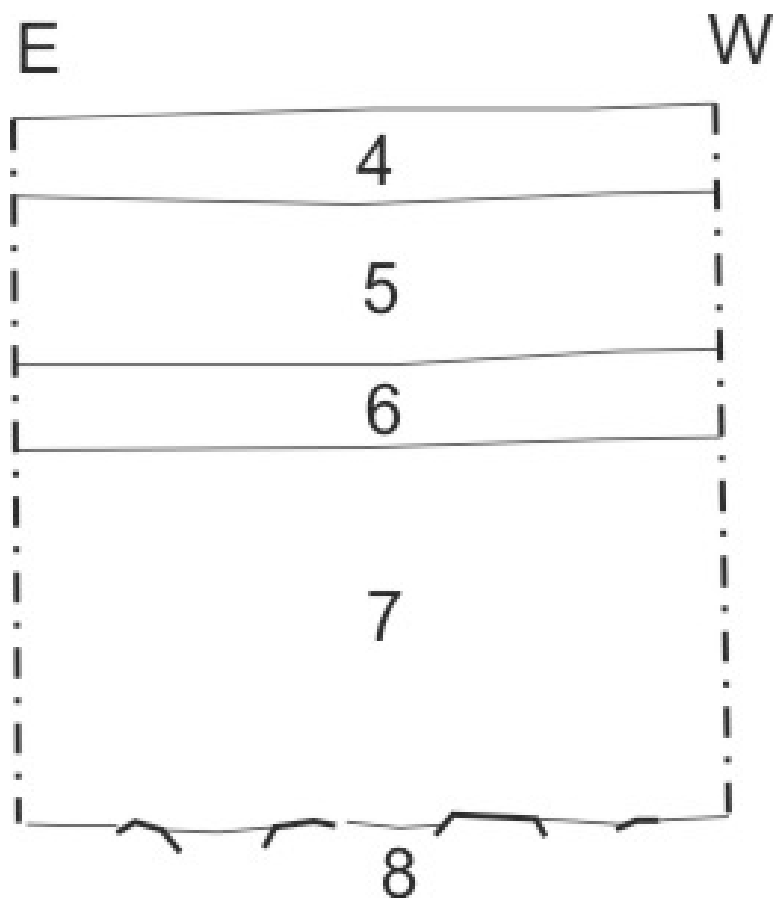


Illustration 4 North facing section of Test Pit 2 Scale 1:20



Illustration 5 Test Pit 1 looking South



Illustration 6 Test Pit 2 looking South West



Illustration 7 Mortar bonded stonework visible at base of Test Pit



Illustration 8 Neck and base from glass bottle and clay pipe stem from context 3 in Test Pit 1