

**An Archaeological Evaluation of Astley's Paints,
The Former Calcott Brothers Factory, Far Gosford Street,
Coventry (SP 755 604).**

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Planning Application: 42919/E

For: UNITE Integrated Solutions Plc.

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Summary

University of Leicester of Leicester Archaeological Services were commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation of Astley's Paints, the former Calcott Brothers factory, Far Gosford Street, Coventry in 2006. An archaeological desk-based assessment had identified the site as lying within the historic medieval core of Coventry and likely to have significant archaeological deposits.

A total of seven trenches were excavated across the extent of the proposed development area. Deep archaeologically-significant stratigraphy was uncovered within the trenches adjacent to the Far Gosford Street frontage and analysis of recovered pottery indicates twelfth/thirteenth century occupation and possible evidence of industrial land use. Earlier deposits may well exist beneath these features. Evidence of post-medieval stone built buildings was also uncovered along the frontage, again with potential for earlier deposits beneath.

Trenches towards the rear of the proposed development area contained evidence of palaeo-environmental significance and evidence of relic river channels associated with the adjacent River Sherbourne.

1. Introduction

University of Leicester Archaeological Services were commissioned by UNITE Integrated Solutions Plc to undertake an archaeological evaluation of Astley's Paints, Far Gosford Street, Coventry (SP 755 604). Planning permission has been granted for the partial demolition of the site and the construction of six student accommodation blocks (Planning Application Number 42919/E). An archaeological desk-based assessment (Marsden, 2003) had identified that the proposed development area lies within an area of known archaeological significance. In view of this, the planning archaeologist as advisor to Coventry City Council, requested that a programme of intrusive investigation through trial trenching be carried out to establish the extent of earth fast archaeological remains.

The site is 'T' shaped and measures approximately 175m north to south and 100m east to west (*c.0.9ha*). The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of Alluvial deposits. The site is located adjacent to the existing course of the river Sherbourne on the western side and formerly had a tributary, Springfield Brook that crossed through the central part of the site and merged in the southern half of the site (ULAS 2006).

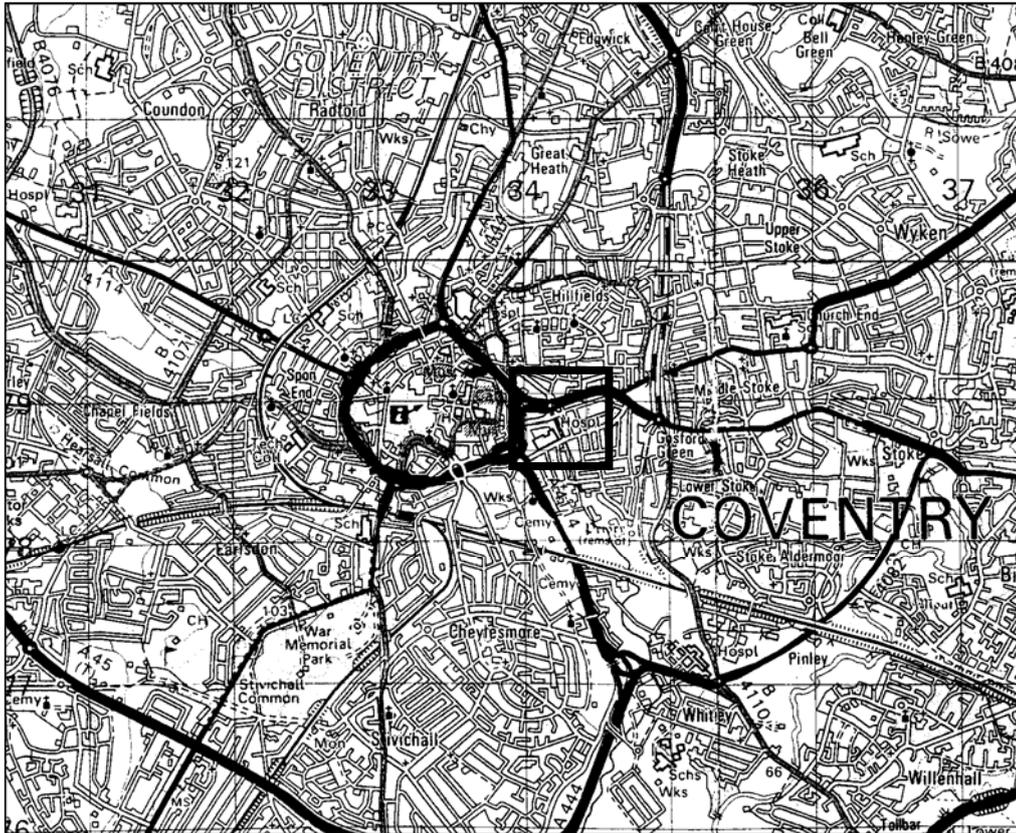


Figure 1 Location of proposed development area. Scale 1:50000

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2. Archaeological and Historical Background

Until demolition, the proposed development area had been in industrial use, housing Astley's Paints to the rear and an industrial consumables business on the Far Gosford Street frontage. The site had originally been built for Calcott Bros, an early 20th-century car manufacturer. These buildings can be divided into three distinct areas; the two large sheds to the rear and the office building fronting Far Gosford Street and earliest cycle sheds adjoining the rear of the offices. The more ornate buildings fronting Far Gosford Street are to be retained and converted, as are the cycle sheds to the rear. Only the two large sheds and several lesser buildings fronting Vecquery Street are to be demolished. The buildings have already been subject to an archaeological standing building survey (Richards, 2006).

The archaeological desk-based assessment identified that the site lies in an area of known archaeological significance, within the historic core of medieval Coventry and also lies within a designated Conservation Area. It suggested that extensive medieval and later occupational remains were likely along the Far Gosford Street frontage, along with associated yard activity to the rear. Shut Lane, a street which may have medieval origins, also lies within the development area. Remains relating to the

medieval Dover and Calais Bridges could also be present, and Civil War entrenchments could be located within the proposed development area. The probable lack of later deep building foundations and cellars, together with substantial alluvial deposits over most of the site, indicate that deeply-buried archaeological remains, including waterlogged deposits, might be well preserved on most of the site, including the high potential frontage area close to Far Gosford Street.

3. Aims and Objectives

The aim of the archaeological work was to ascertain whether any significant archaeological remains were present within the area to be developed. The general objectives as stated in the Coventry City Council Brief are:

- To prepare a detailed assessment of a development site's or area's history & archaeological potential;
- To identify any evidence for the survival of buried archaeological remains on the site which may be threatened by development of a site and area;
- To determine the depth of burial, character, date, extent, and state of preservation of any such remains;
- To preserve any archaeological remains identified either by record (excavation) or *in-situ* or a combination of both.

The site has the following specific objectives (From Coventry City Council Brief):

- To determine the preservation, nature, date and extent of the properties fronting onto Far Gosford Street and their associated rear plots – *Cartographic evidence shows that the frontage of Far Gosford Street within the site area was occupied during the post-medieval period (post-Civil War – see below). Documentary evidence also confirms that buildings were present in the medieval period in the area between the two bridges on Far Gosford Street (Dover and Calais Bridges – see below). It is very likely that the site area on the frontage of Far Gosford Street contains archaeological evidence for the former structures that would have stood on the site for both the medieval and post-medieval periods. Evidence for rear yard activities associated with these properties on the frontage is also likely to survive most probably in the area between the two water courses (as shown clearly on the Board of Health map of Coventry of 1851);*
- To locate and assess the level of survival of the medieval Dover and Calais Bridges – *The River Sherbourne has been somewhat canalised during the post-medieval period to form the straight course that defines the existing western edge of the proposed development area. A tributary to the Sherbourne, the Springfield Brook, also crossed the site area, running from the western edge of Shut Lane across the centre of the site converging with the Sherbourne. Both the river and the tributary were crossed by bridges in the medieval period. It is possible that remnants of both bridges could survive at the site, including timber remains preserved in waterlogged deposits;*
- To assess the potential significance of any waterlogged organic remains associated with the watercourses running through the site – *The site area is very likely to be fairly waterlogged at depth, due to the presence of both the River Sherbourne and Springfield Brook that formerly crossed the site before*

being filled in during the 19th Century. It is anticipated that much of the site area would have been fairly boggy until remediation works during the later 19th and 20th centuries. It is likely that the height of the land has been raised to avoid the wetter ground, which will survive below the levelling material, as would be apparent from borehole results. Such conditions are usually suitable for the survival of organic material such as organic remains, macro fossils, plant remains and pollen which can give a good indication of both the environment of the site area during earlier periods as well as provide evidence for diet. Material such as wood and leather may also survive. Such material has been found before within Coventry adjacent to the former course of the River Sherbourne at the Millennium View site off Hales Street;

- To locate and assess any surviving buried remains of the Civil War defences known to have been within the area – The Gosford Gate on the Coventry town wall lay directly to the south-west of the proposed development area. During the Civil War the town defences were fortified, which included the levelling of properties directly outside of the gates to allow for either defensive earthworks or ditches to be constructed to allow better defence of the town gates. A similar process occurred in many towns during the civil war, including at Hill Street in Coventry and at the Newark in Leicester, and archaeological investigation has demonstrated that where earthworks were constructed earth fast remains of earlier medieval structures survived preserved beneath earthworks and later development. This could also be the case at Far Gosford Street.

4. Methodology

The planning archaeologist as advisor to Coventry City Council following Planning Policy Guidelines 16 (PPG 16, Archaeology and Planning para. 30) requested a c.5% sample of the proposed development area, (approximately 9236.5 sq m). This is equivalent to approximately ten trenches (each 20m x 2m). Due to the depth of modern overburden and other site constraints and in consultation with the planning archaeologist this figure was revised a total of 7 trenches were excavated, sampling an area approximately 134 sq m (Fig. 2).

Three further areas totalling 83.4 sq m were also monitored during the contaminated ground strip making a total area of 217.4 sq m, approximately 2.5% of the proposed development area.

Modern overburden was removed carefully in level spits, under archaeological supervision by an excavator using a toothless ditching bucket down to the top of archaeological deposits or natural undisturbed ground. The trenches were then cleaned, sampled and recorded by hand.

5. Results

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located towards the southern edge of the proposed development area, approximately 17 metres from the Gulson Road frontage, towards the centre of this part of the site (Fig. 2), aligned north - south. Approximately 800mm to 1100mm of 19th/20th century overburden was stripped revealing a horizon of brown alluvial deposits, devoid of any significant archaeological deposits. Further machine excavation was carried out in order to ascertain the depth of this deposit and ensure that it was not masking earlier archaeologically significant layers.

The initial alluvial layer ranged in depth from between 300mm and 760mm, below which was coarse grey alluvial sand containing isolated pockets of brushwood. Again nothing of archaeological significance was visible. This area appears to consist of alluvial build up from the adjacent River Sherbourne and contains little in the way of cultural archaeological remains; the alluvial remains, however, may contain important environmental evidence.

5.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

Trench 2 was excavated towards the northern edge of the proposed development area, approximately 20 metres from the Far Gosford Street frontage and 3 metres northeast of the River Sherbourne (Fig. 2). It was expected that this trench would encounter rear yard activity associated with any buildings fronting Far Gosford Street. Between 500mm and 800mm of 19th/20th-century overburden was excavated before a brownish-grey clay silt was uncovered. There were no identifiable archaeological features within this layer so excavation continued. Some anomalies were noted within the excavated material, but nothing distinct and excavation continued for a further 1000mm to 1200mm until what appeared to be clay bedrock was revealed with features cut into it.

Further hand cleaning indicated at least six clear features. What appeared to be natural bedrock was in fact redeposited weathered bedrock, containing charcoal flecks (144). Cleaning of the exposed sections also indicated a number of potentially archaeologically significant layers above the level reached by excavation. It was decided to sample excavate four of the features; [132], an apparent north south linear feature, [128], a slag filled pit, [146] an east west linear and [141], an irregular shaped pit.

Excavation of [132] confirmed a linear feature, 400mm deep and at least 600mm wide, although the edge of the trench prevented full excavation. The fill (131) comprised dark-grey silty clay and a primary silting in the base (145). A number of sherds of later thirteenth century pottery were recovered from (131) but no dating evidence was recovered from (145). The second excavated feature, [128] was an irregular shaped pit, approximately 1000mm by 1200mm by 180mm deep. The fill, (129) consisted of grey silty clay and large nodules of iron slag; again a number of sherds of pottery were recovered, including later medieval pottery.

The final excavated feature, [147] was a substantial linear feature, approximately 2500mm wide and 280mm deep, aligned east west. The fill, (139) consisted of dark grey silty clay, containing later thirteenth century pottery.

5.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 4)

Trench 3 was located to sample any potential yard activity on the Far Gosford Street frontage, the trench was aligned northeast southwest, approximately 10 metres south of the retained buildings (Fig. 2). A similar depth of 19th/20th-century overburden was removed onto a uniform horizon of grey-brown clay silt (154), approximately 750mm of (154) was excavated before discrete, archaeological features were encountered.

Further hand cleaning revealed an east-west aligned, partially rubble-filled linear feature [160] and five pits; [169], [176], [186], [188], and [193]. It was decided to sample excavate both [160] and [188]. It was clear that [160] contained a number of separate fills, so the excavated section was located to specifically sample a number of these. The upper fill (180) consisted of redeposited grey-green marl and appeared to be contained within the butt end of [160], measuring 480mm in depth and 1000mm wide. Unfortunately no dating evidence was recovered during the excavation. To the west of (180) were two separate fills, (181) and (184), both of which grey-brown silty clay and were no more than 140mm deep. Fill (181), however, contained a greater amount of degraded lime mortar than (184). Two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from (184). [160] appeared to cutting through earlier archaeological layers, and is therefore likely to represent a later phase of activity in this part of the site.

The second excavated feature within trench 3 was [188], a clearly defined pit towards the south-western end of the trench. Again there were a number of different fills within [188] including a deposit of wood chippings (197), approximately 450mm deep containing a single sherd of medieval pottery. Wood chippings are commonly used during tanning suggesting the possibility of some kind of tanning activity taking place during the medieval period on the site. The secondary fill, (189) consisted of light brown clay and was approximately 100mm deep and 1300mm by 600mm in size. As with the north-eastern part of the trench, the feature was cut into an earlier archaeological layer, and therefore, represents a later phase of activity.

As with trench 2 the sections also consisted of apparently archaeologically significant layers.

5.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 6)

Based upon the results of trench 1, it was decided to locate trench 4 perpendicular to trench 1 and the River Sherbourne, to create a section across the deposits in order to record and sample the alluvial deposits. Limited space and modern disturbance towards the eastern edge of the proposed development area prevented the excavation of a complete section; however, enough was exposed for recording purposes. As expected the same alluvial deposits seen in trench 1 were encountered, sealed with approximately 1000mm of 19th/20th century overburden. A number of animal bones and horn cores were recovered from the lower deposits, although no dating evidence was recovered.

Bulk samples were taken from each context and a monolith sample taken through the full depth of the deposits.

5.5 Trench 5 (Fig. 5)

Trench 5 was one of two trenches excavated on the Far Gosford Street frontage and was located approximately five metres from the north-western corner of the proposed development area (Fig. 2). Only approximately 250mm to 400mm of demolition debris was excavated before stone-built walls were encountered. Although much disturbed and considerably truncated, hand cleaning indicated at least three separate walls, two aligned north-south and a third aligned east-west with a number of other stone concentrations.

This stone work undoubtedly relates to the houses which originally stood here prior to the construction of the Singer showroom in 1927, and only recently demolished. Photographic evidence suggests the houses were 17th/18th century in date. Earlier archaeologically significant deposits may well lie below these remains but further excavation was deemed unnecessary at this time.

5.6 Trench 6 (Fig. 5)

Trench 6 was the second trench excavated on the Far Gosford Street frontage (Fig. 2). A similar depth of demolition debris was excavated before redeposited weathered clay bedrock was uncovered. Some limited stone work was uncovered towards the south western end of the trench and a stone and brick footing was uncovered along the northern edge of the trench. As with trench 5, this stone work probably relates to the seventeenth/eighteenth century houses which originally stood on the Far Gosford Street frontage. There were no further identifiable archaeological features visible so excavation continued, without disturbing the exposed stone work.

Excavation continued through a mixed deposit of redeposited weathered red clay bedrock containing building debris and charcoal flecks. When excavation reached 1200mm without any discernable change it was decided to cease excavation for safety reasons. In all likelihood this deposit represents some kind of imported levelling layer, either later medieval or post medieval in date.

5.7 Trench 7

The final evaluation trench was located on the Vecquery Street frontage on the eastern most part of the proposed development area. The trench was located towards the centre of this part of the proposed development area, 2000mm back from the Vecquery Street frontage (Fig 2). Approximately 1300mm of modern overburden was excavated before weathered bedrock was exposed; there was nothing of archaeological significance observed within this trench and the trench was recorded and backfilled.

5.8 Contaminated Ground Strip

As well as the seven evaluation trenches, three areas of contaminated ground were monitored during remediation work in order to ascertain the presence of any archaeological deposits. Two areas lay towards the centre of the proposed development area with a third immediately to the rear of the retained building on the Far Gosford Street frontage (Fig. 2). Evidence of a substantial stone structure was observed within the south facing section of the trench immediately to the rear of the retained buildings. However, as this area was not affected by the proposed development, no further work was carried out. Nothing of archaeological significance was observed within the other areas of contamination.

6. Conclusions

There was a varied depth of 19th/20th century overburden across the site becoming deeper to the south. This ranged from 250 – 400mm along the Far Gosford Street frontage, to 500 – 800mm south of this (trenches 2 and 3) and up to a metre close to the river (trenches 1 and 4). The depth and variety of archaeological deposits appears to fall into three clear areas – the frontage, the alluvial area close to the river and the area between.

Along the Far Gosford Street frontage stone footings were exposed. Cartographic evidence suggests that this frontage was occupied during the post-medieval period. There is also likely to be medieval remains of buildings between the two bridges on Far Gosford Street. The stonework encountered is likely to be the footings of 17th/18th century buildings. Although not exposed at this time, there probably is deep archaeological stratigraphy, lying below the stone and brick footings which will undoubtedly be affected by the proposed development. The deeper excavations into trench 6 suggests a thick layer of redeposited material in this area down to at least 1.2m, again with the possibility that earlier features could either cut through or lie beneath the deposit.

The evaluation also established a density of archaeological deposits and a considerable depth of archaeological stratigraphy away from the frontage; trenches 2 and 3 both included archaeological features in plan at a depth of around 1.2m. Both these trenches also revealed an indistinct horizon between the overburden and the cut features. Further cleaning and study suggests that these also contain archaeological levels that were difficult to distinguish with evaluation trenches. Although there is no indication of the function of these features, pottery suggests later 13th century date for some of the activity. The presence of a quantity of iron slag and wood chippings may indicate possible industrial activity in the area. The wood chipping might suggest evidence for tanning along with the animal bone and horn cores from trench 4.

The redeposited material in this area may well represent a made-ground deposit used to raise the level above the waterlogged areas to the south. This material could well contain or seal earlier deposits.

To the south of the area, the evaluations uncovered evidence of considerable alluvial build up related to the adjacent River Sherbourne. Although no cultural archaeological remains were recovered in this area, significant environmental

evidence is no doubt present within this part of the proposed development area. Both the River Sherbourne and the Springfield Brook crossed the site before being filled in during the 19th century and much of this area is likely to have remained fairly boggy until the remedial works in the 19th-20th centuries (Coventry City Council Brief). Some of the redeposited material found to the north may well represent an attempt to raise the level above the waterlogged areas. Further work on the samples taken may reveal more information on the nature and preservation of the deposits recovered.

Other specific objectives of the project were to locate the level of survival of the medieval Dover and Calais bridges and any buried remains of the Civil war defences within the area. No features associated with either civil war features or the bridges were identified during the evaluation.

7. References

Brief, City Of Coventry *A brief for a second phase of archaeological evaluation (trial trenches) at Astley's, Far Gosford Street, Coventry.*

Marsden, P. 2003. *An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment for land off Far Gosford Street, Coventry.* ULAS Report 2003-114.

Patrick, C. 2005. *A brief for a programme of historic building recording and interpretation at Astley's, (the former Calcott works) Far Gosford Street, Coventry.* Coventry City Council.

Richards, G. *An Archaeological Standing Building Survey Of The Astley's Paints, The Former Calcott Brothers Factory, Far Gosford Street, Coventry (SP 755 604).* ULAS Report Number 2006-050.

ULAS, 2006. Design Specification for Archaeological Attendance During Demolition and Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation. *Site: Astley's The Former Calcott Works, Far Gosford Street, Coventry.*

8. Archive and Publication

The site archive comprises:

monochrome negative and contact prints
digital images and contact prints
6 A2 Permatrace Drawings
2 A4 photographic index sheets
2 A4 drawing index sheets
93 A4 context sheets
3 A4 context summary sheets
1 A4 Sample index sheet
1 A4 Small finds index sheet
3 A4 Survey record sheets
2 A4 Trench recording sheets
1 A4 Watching brief sheet
1 A4 Pottery index

This will be deposited with Coventry Herbert Art Gallery and Museum.

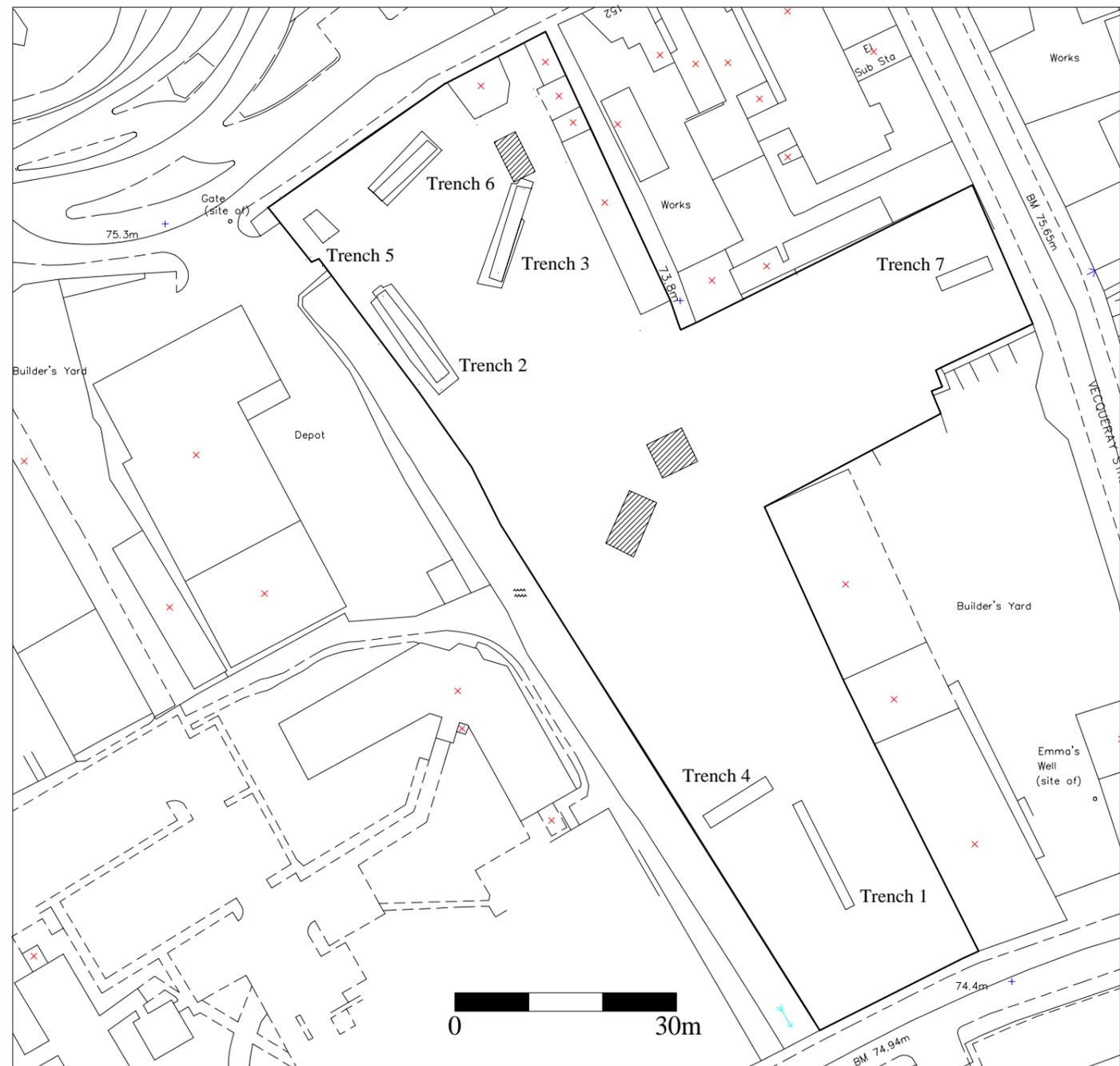


Figure 2 Trench Location Plan

 Contaminated Ground Strip Monitored By Watching Brief

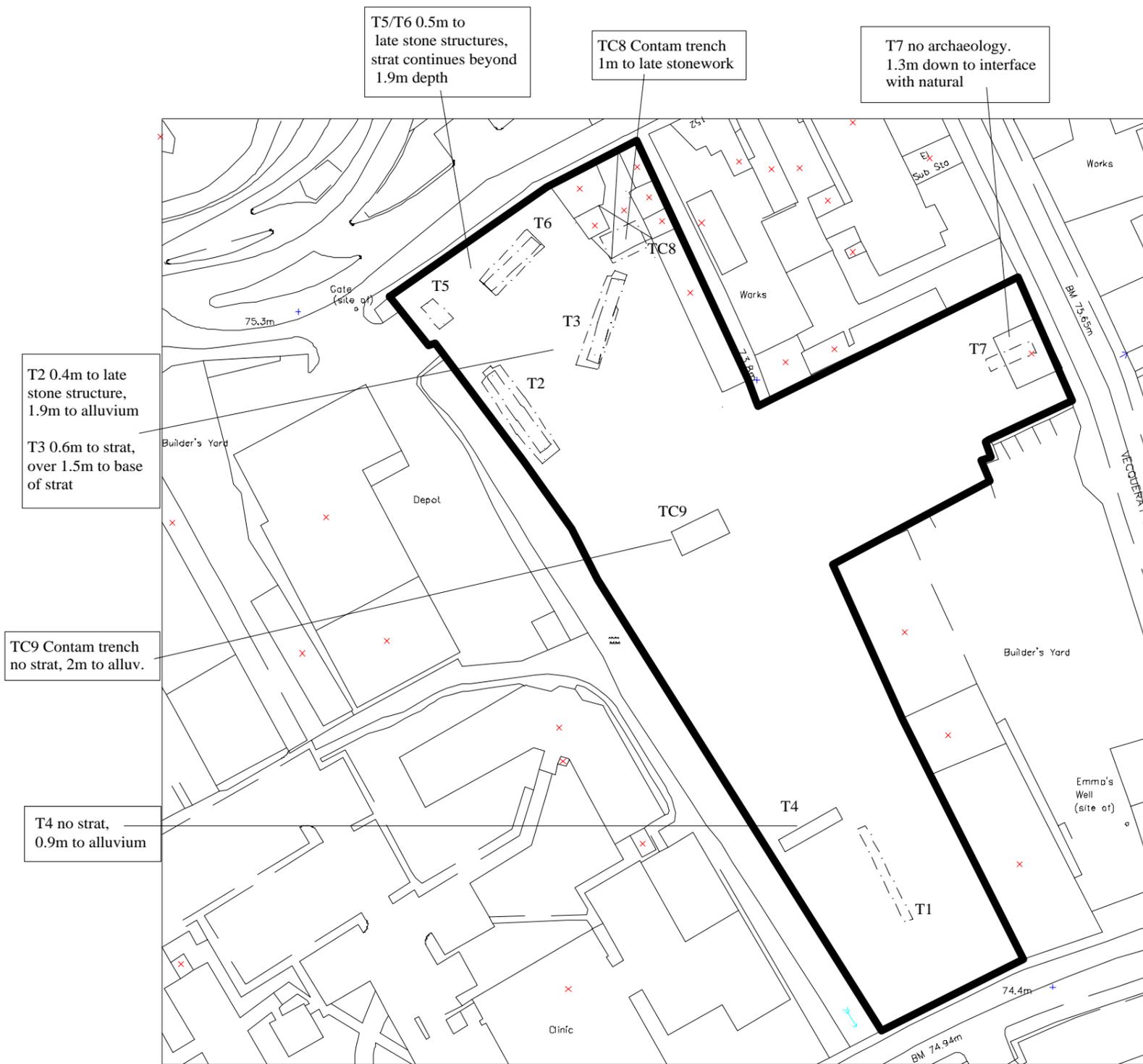
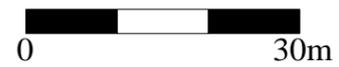


Figure 3 Depth of Stratigraphy



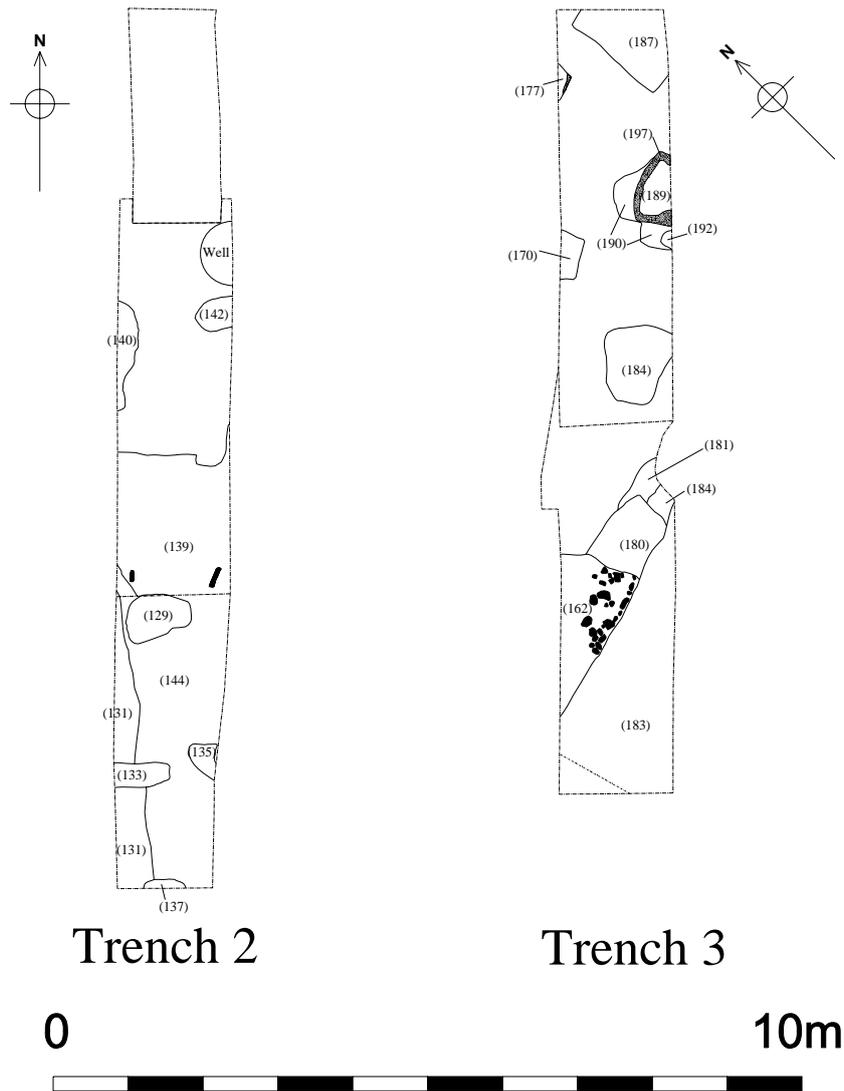


Figure 4 Trenches 2 & 3, Plan.

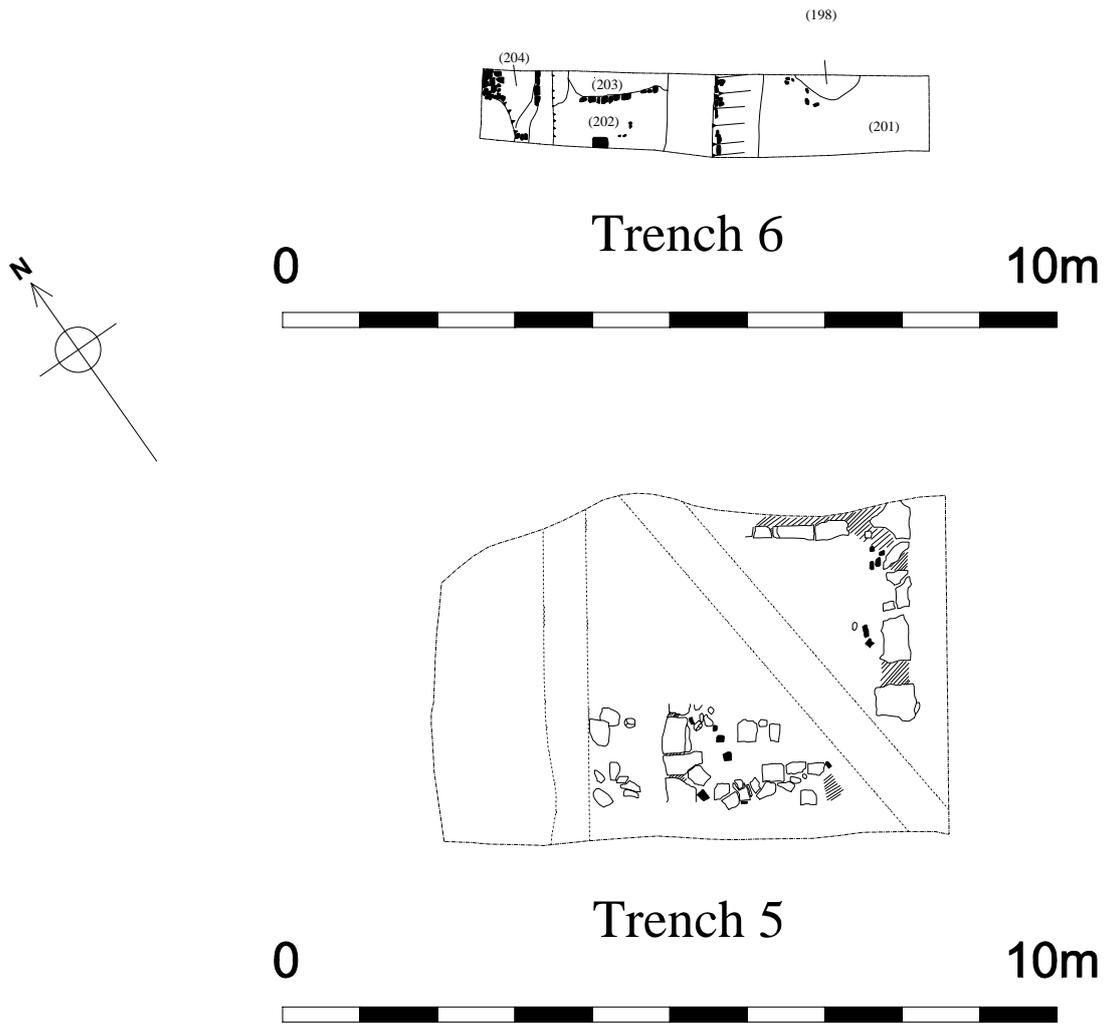
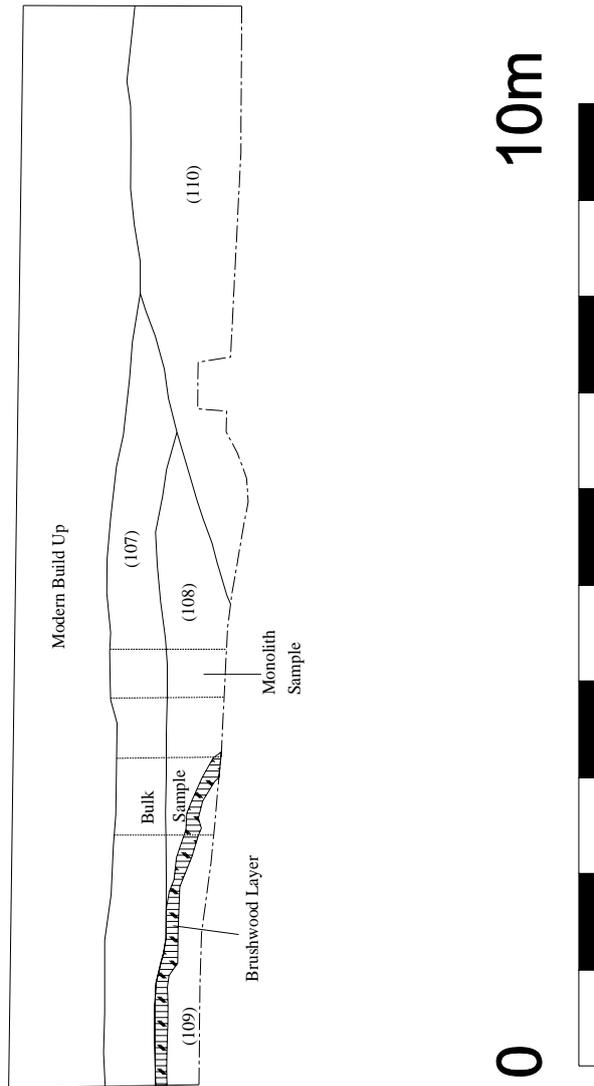


Figure 5 Trenches 5 & 6, Plan.



Trench 4 South Facing Section