

**ST NICHOLAS HOUSE, ABERDEEN, AB10 1AR  
SOFT STRIP PRIOR TO DEMOLITION  
EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF**



Cameron Archaeology  
5 November 2012

# ST NICHOLAS HOUSE, ABERDEEN, AB10 1AR SOFT STRIP PRIOR TO DEMOLITION

## REPORT ON THE EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF

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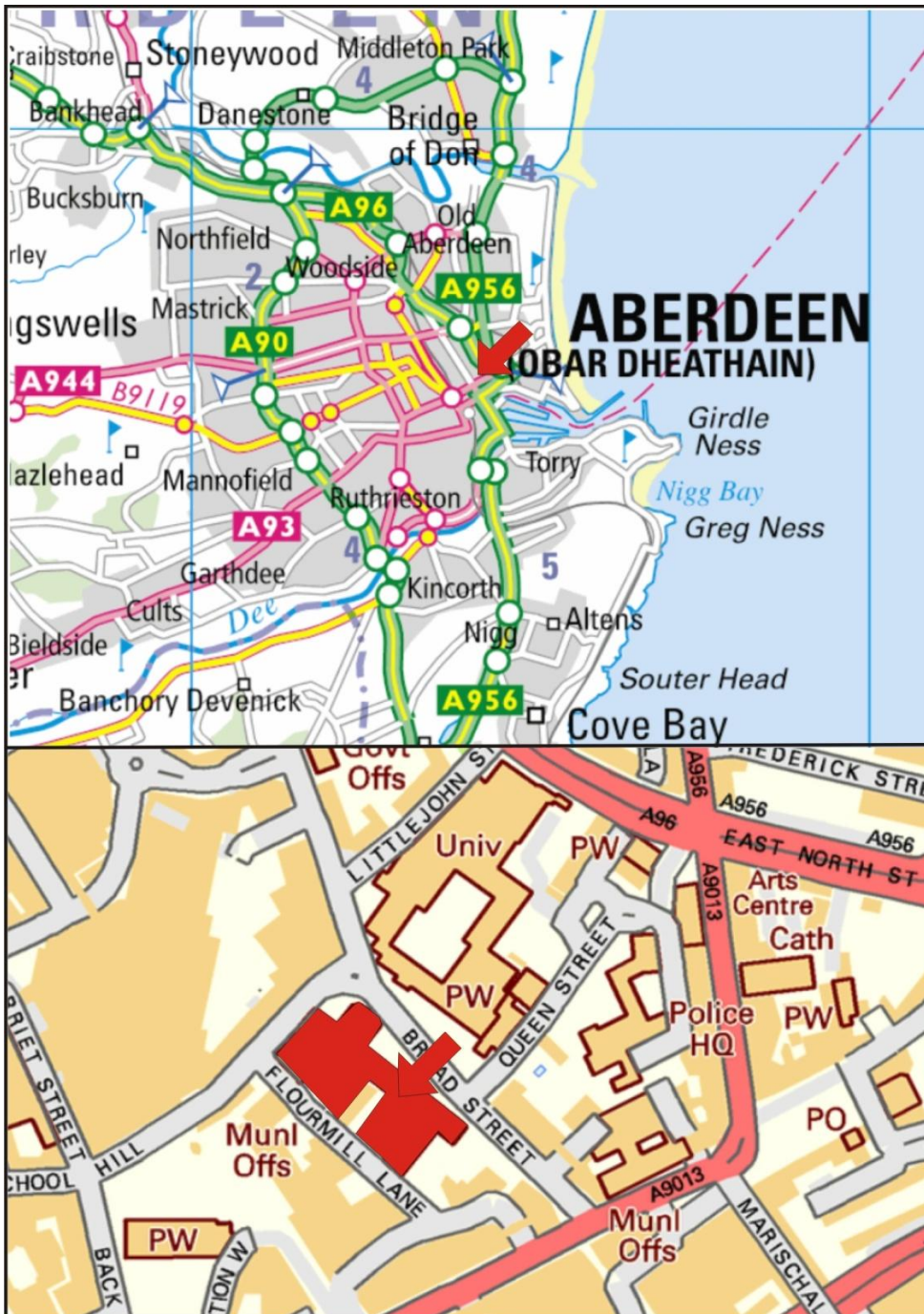
### ILLUSTRATIONS

cover (top) view of Trench 1 (centre) with Provost Skene's House in background; facing north  
(bottom) Trench 1 wall foundation trench F1 facing SW

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Aberdeen City Council are carrying out a soft strip and possible demolition of St Nicholas House, the former headquarters of the Council. The work is not subject to Planning Permission but the Council has appointed Cameron Archaeology to carry out archaeological work following advice from Judith Stones, Lead Curator, Local History and Archaeology Museums and Galleries, Education, Culture and Sport, Aberdeen City Council. The project contact is Andrew Sproull, Programme Director, Marischal College Project, Marischal College, Aberdeen, AB10 1AB. The site is at NJ 94198 06385 (centred), in the parish of Aberdeen and at 20-25m OD.

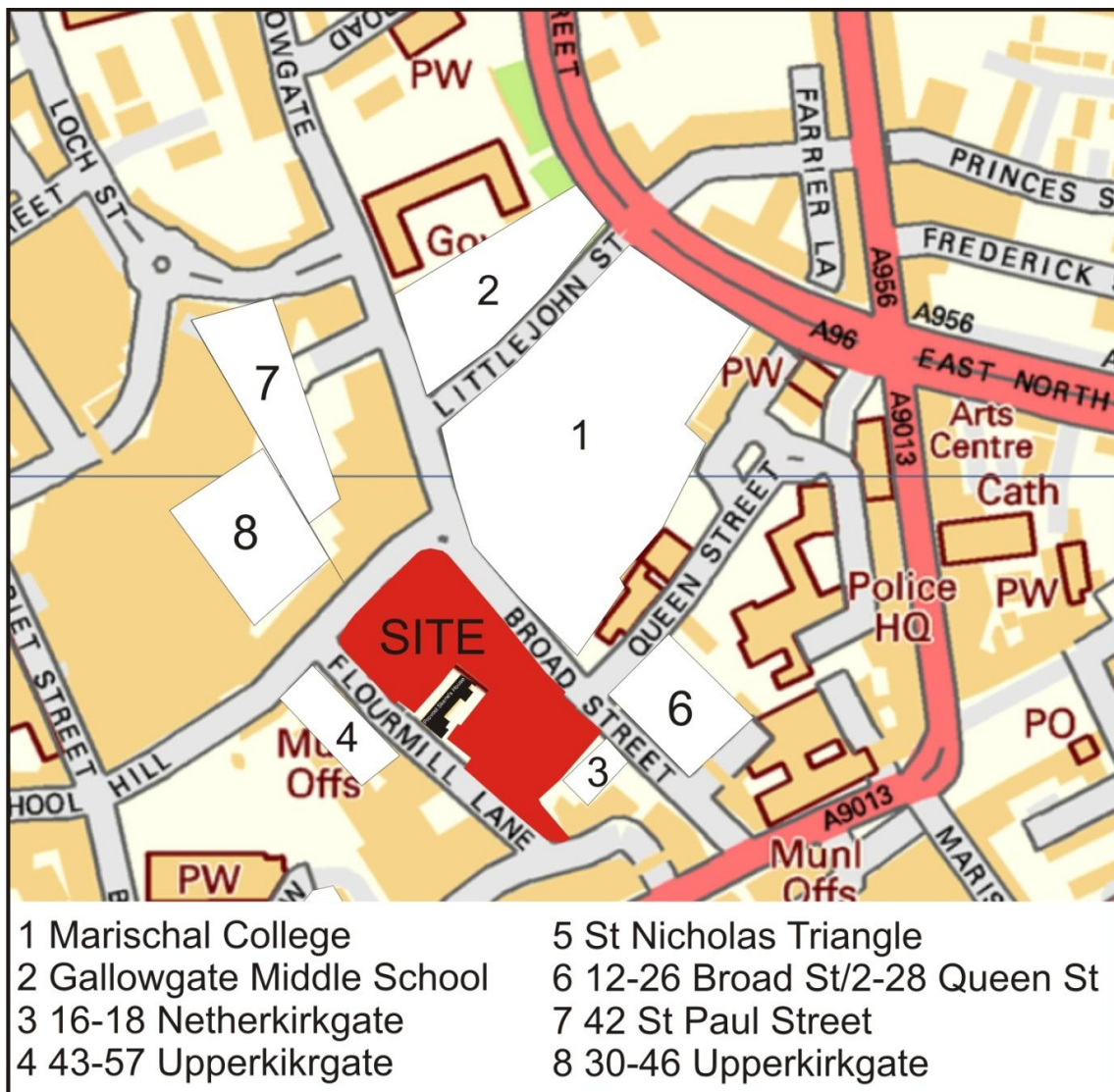


Illus 1 Site location (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012).

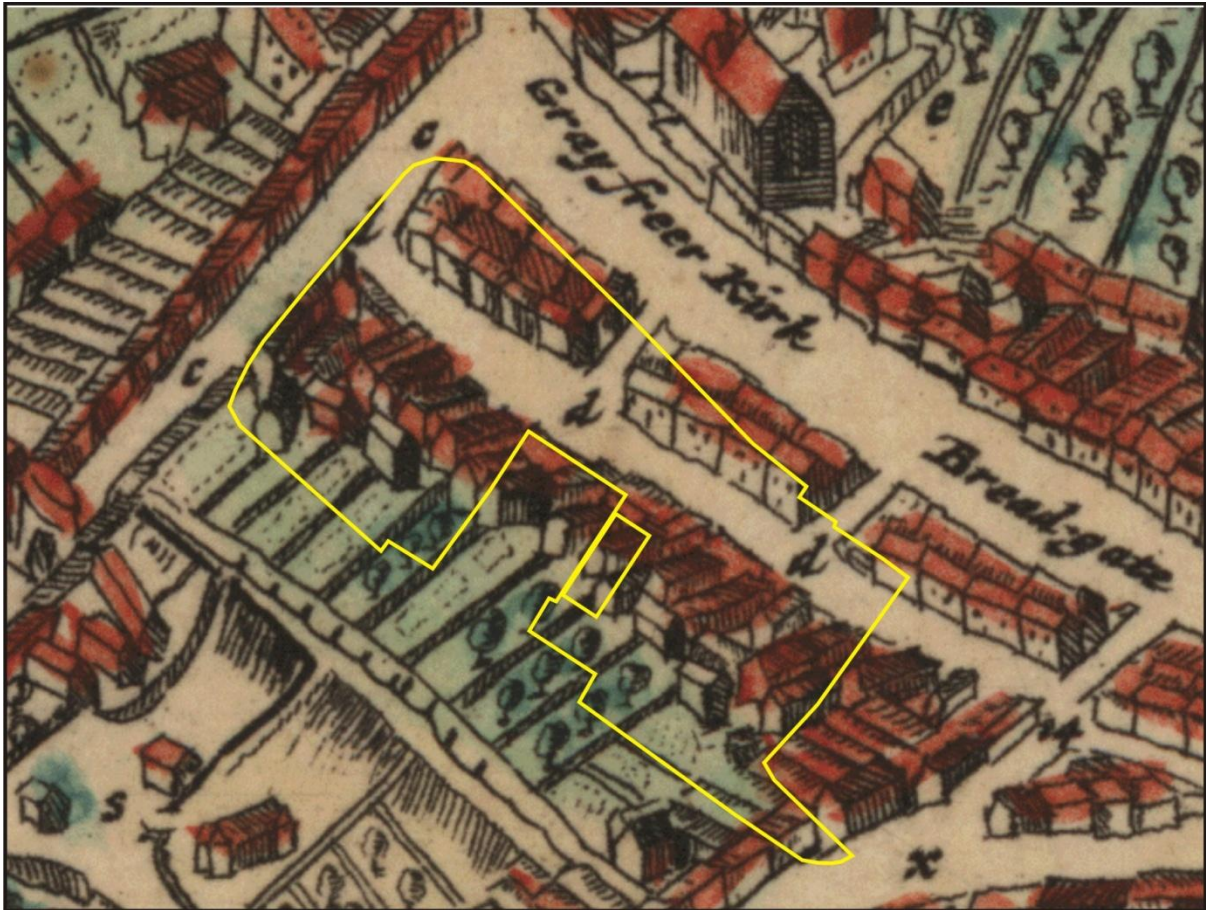


## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site is centred upon National Grid Reference NJ 94198 06385 and is bounded by Broad Street to the east, Upperkirkgate to the north, Flourmill Brae to the west and Netherkirkgate to the south.
- 2.2 Mesolithic activity has been found at several sites in the vicinity. Several hundred flints were recovered from earliest layers at the adjacent 16-18 Netherkirkgate/Guestrow site (Cameron 2001, 30; Illus 2 No 3) and at 12-26 Broad Street (Murray 1982, 26-27; Illus 2, No 6).
- 2.3 This site is at the centre of the medieval burgh of Aberdeen; Parson James Gordon's map of Aberdeen 1661 (Illus 3) shows that this area was well developed by this period. Substantial well-preserved medieval remains were found at several sites in the vicinity including Marischal College on the opposite of Broad Street (Cameron forthcoming), Gallowgate Middle School (Cameron 2001, 73-79), 43-57 Upperkirkgate/Flourmill Brae (Cameron 2001, 50-58), 16-18 Netherkirkgate (Cameron 2001, 28-37), 30-46 Upperkirkgate (Stones 2001, 60-69) and 42 St Paul Street (Murray 1982, 46-84).



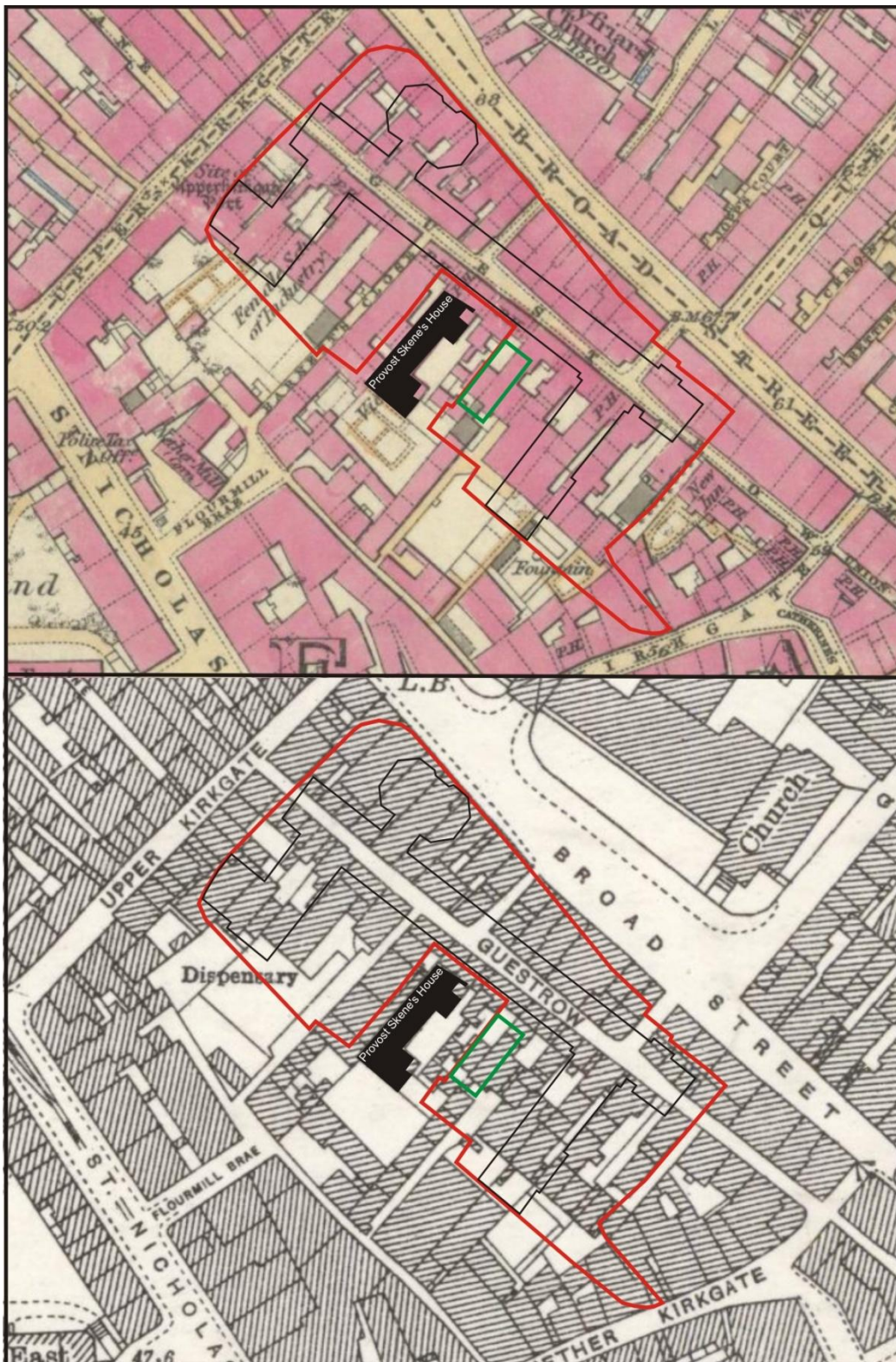
Illus 2 St Nicholas House with neighbouring archaeological interventions (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012).



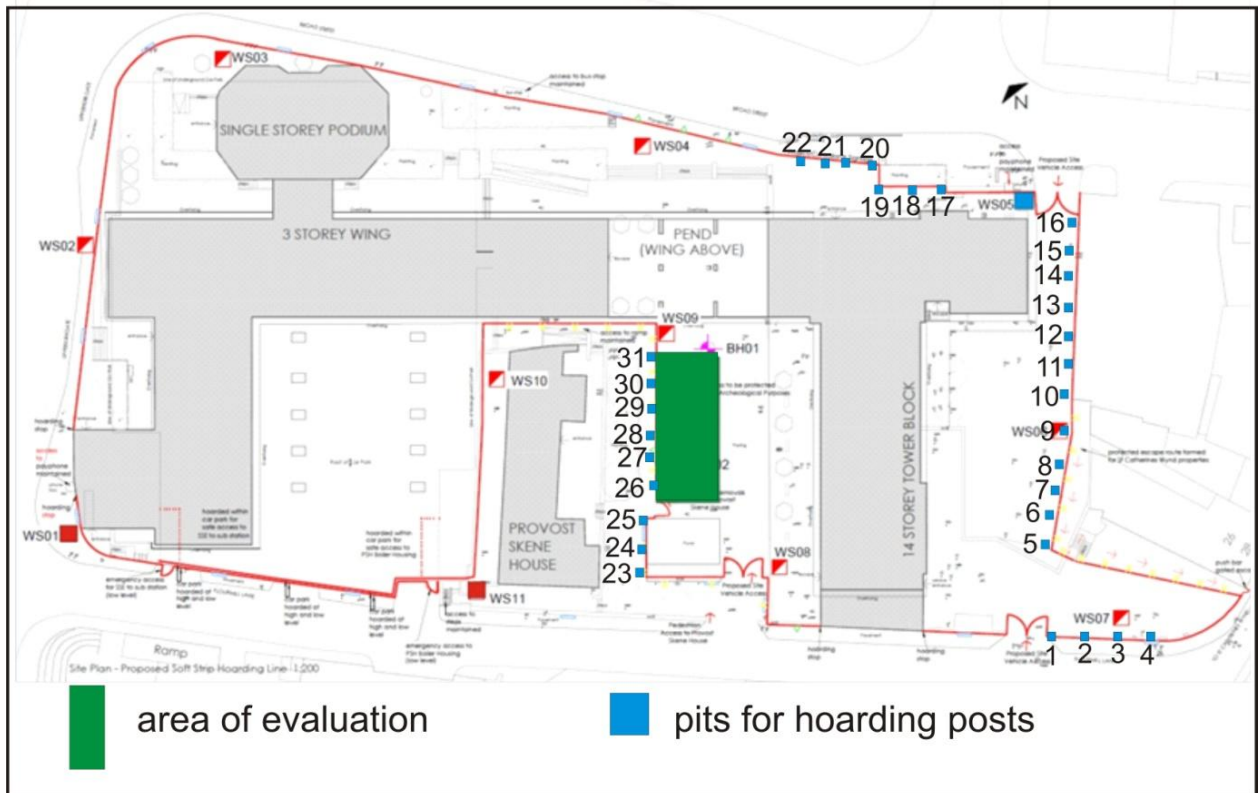
Illus 3 Parson James Gordon's map, 1661, showing approximate area of site (In yellow) (copyright National Library of Scotland); d Gwestraw, x Neither Kirkgate, 14 Rotten Raw, s The Flower Mill, f The over Kirkgate Porte

- 2.4 Provost Skene's House was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and is one of the Aberdeen's few surviving examples of early burgh architecture. The first reference to the plot of land was in 1545 when Alexander Knollis took possession of the site on Guestrow, one of Aberdeen's principal streets at that time . By 1661 (Illus 3) the NE part of the site is occupied by houses on the south side of Broad/Bread Street, south of which Guestrow (Gwestraw) runs across the current site NW-SE and south of this another line of buildings which include What is now Provost Skene's House. South-west of these buildings are backlands running along the entire west edge of the site.
- 2.5 The site is heavily built up in the First and Second Edition Ordnance Survey maps (Illus 4) with Guestrow still extant across the site and extensive buildings on both the north and south of this street.





Illus 4 First Edition Ordnance Survey (top) and Second Edition (bottom) with site outline (red) and Provost Skene's House (black) (copyright National Library of Scotland)



Illus 5 Plan showing location of areas of archaeological evaluation and hoarding post pits (copyright Mott MacDonald)

### 3 HOARDING POST PITS - WATCHING BRIEF

Three areas of pits for the posts for the hoarding were observed. All pits contained only 19th and 20th century deposits and these were mainly concrete, brick and stone associated with the roads, St Nicholas House and the 19th-century tenements which had previously occupied much of the site. Details appear in archive. No watching brief was carried out at the Upperkirkgate end of the site as this area has been disturbed by the underground car park. The hoarding on the north and NW sides of Provost Skene's House were attached onto existing fences and fittings and so no post-holes were required in these areas.

### 4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

A grassed area 9 x 20m in size was available for archaeological evaluation and two trenches were excavated on 28 September 2012.

#### Trench 1

This trench was a maximum of 3m wide and the full width of the area. To the west an electric cable was encountered; a bore hole had been sunk to the east of this trench. Two wall foundation trenches (F1 and F2; Illus 7, 10) were up to 1.2m deep and 1m wide and were associated with the 19th-century tenements which were on the site on the OS maps (Illus 9).





Illus 6 Trench 1 wall foundation trench F1 facing SW

### **Trench 2**

Trench 2 was at the NE end of the available area. A concrete duct (F3; Illus 8-10) was 2m wide and had cut through all deposits at the NW end of the trench. Garden soil deposits at the SE end of the trench on top of natural subsoil indicated that this area had not been disturbed in the medieval or later period. No features or finds were recorded however. There is therefore potential in this area for archaeological deposits to survive and it is recommended that an archaeological evaluation of the surrounding area (Illus 10) should be carried out prior to any future development.

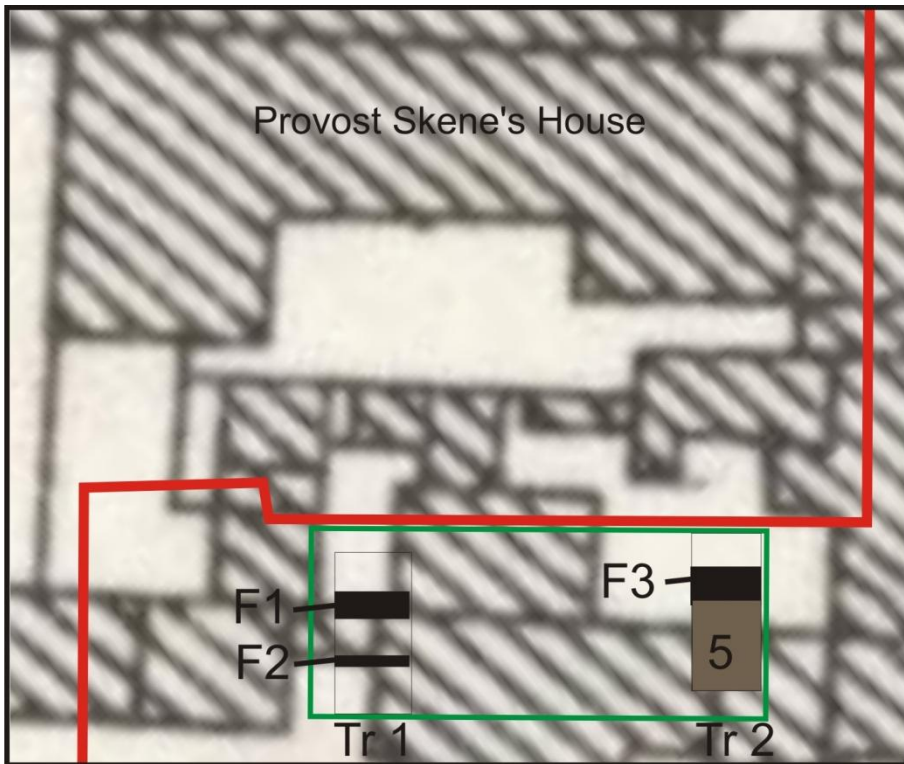


Illus 7 Trench 2 garden soil 5 with sandy subsoil below, facing NE





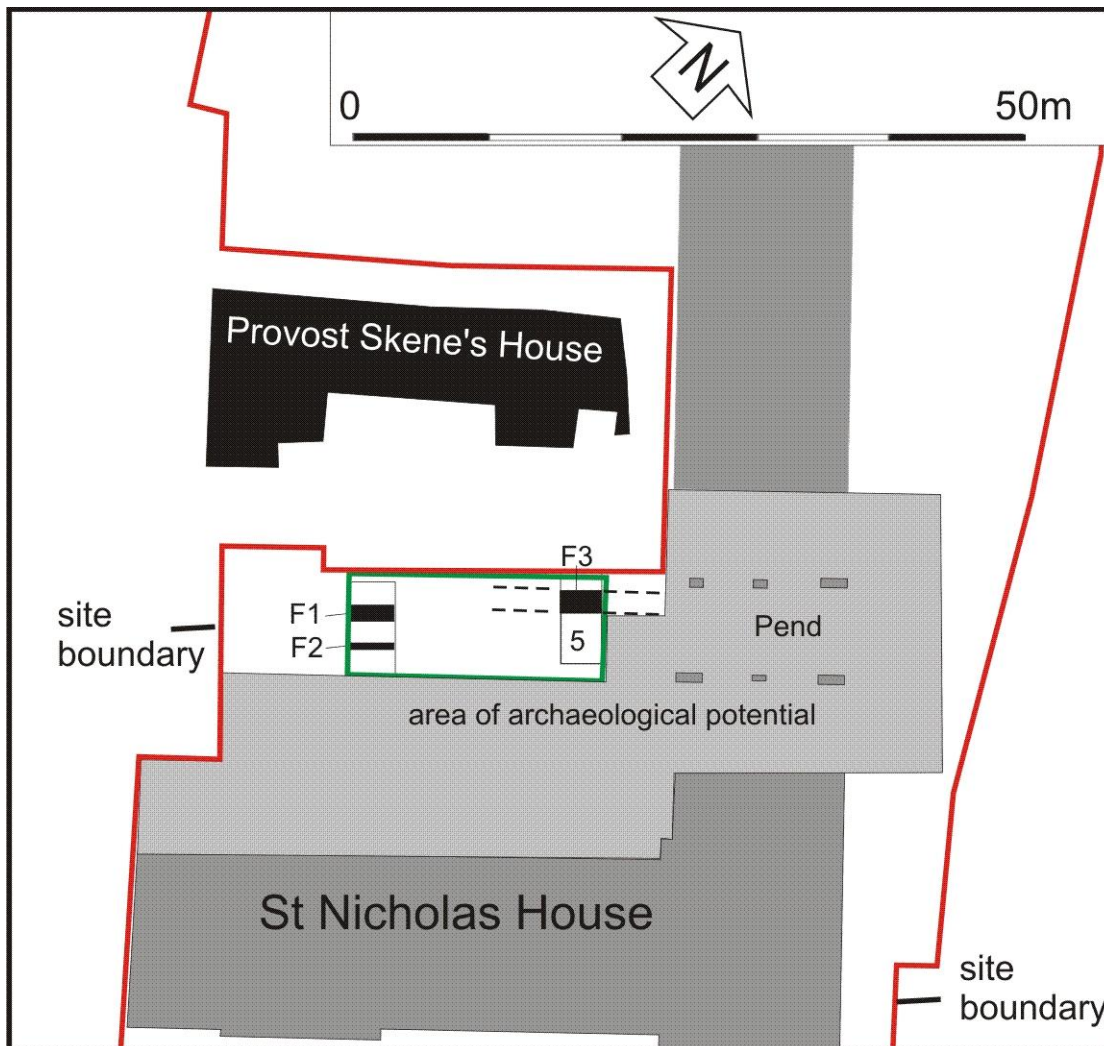
Illus 8 Trench 2 concrete linear structure F3; facing SW.



Illus 9 Archaeological contexts in Trenches 1 and 2.

## 5 FURTHER WORK

During future development of this site an archaeological evaluation of the area labelled 'area of archaeological potential' on Illus 10 will be required to investigate further the undisturbed garden soil levels in Trench 2 of this evaluation.



Illus 10 Plan showing area for archaeological potential.



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## 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Andrew Sproull and Judith Stones, both Aberdeen City Council; Andy Smillie and Bob Pearson, Safedem; Allison fencing staff; Gary Brown, A&S Brown Plant Hire.

## APPENDIX 1

Photographs - watching brief

Photo no	Description	Facing
<b>Hoarding</b>		
DSC_0578-583	Hole 1	NE
DSC_0584-598	Holes 1-4	NE
DSC_0599-608	Hole 2	NE
DSC_0609-613	Hole 3	NE
DSC_0614-620	Hole 4	NE
DSC_0814-886	Holes 11-16	
DSC_0001-0048	Holes 17-22	



DSC\_0582



DSC\_0593



DSC\_0594



DSC\_0603



DSC\_0604



DSC\_0610



DSC\_0616



DSC\_0617



DSC\_0618



DSC\_0619



DSC\_0819



DSC\_0820



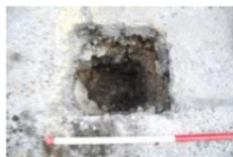
DSC\_0828



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DSC\_0835



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DSC\_0850



DSC\_0851



DSC\_0860



DSC\_0861



DSC\_0869



DSC\_0876



DSC\_0885



DSC\_0886



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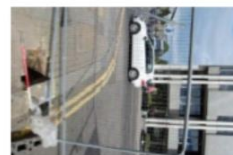
DSC\_0010



DSC\_0011



DSC\_0020



DSC\_0021



DSC\_0032



DSC\_0033



DSC\_0043



Photographs - evaluation

<b>Evaluation</b>		
DSC_0079-80	Trench 1 SW section wall foundation trench F1	SSW
DSC_0081-88	Trench 1 SW section wall foundation trench F1	SW
DSC_0089-95	Trench 1 SW section wall foundation trench F1	SW
DSC_0096-103	Trench 1 showing bore-hole trench through F1	NE
DSC_0104-109	Trench 1	SE
DSC_0112-118	Trench 1 showing bore-hole trench through F1	SSW
DSC_0119-135	Trench 1	NW
DSC_0136-149	Trench 1 with Provost Skene's House in background	NW
DSC_0150-164	Trench 1 SW section wall foundation trench F1	W
DSC_0178-193	Trench 1 with Provost Skene's House in background	NW
DSC_0194-205	Trench 1 Wall foundation F2	NE
DSC_0206-213	Trench 2 F3 foreground; garden soil 5 above natural subsoil (background)	SE
DSC_0214-231	Trench 2 NE section SE end showing garden soil 5 above natural subsoil	NE
DSC_0232-247	Trench 2 natural subsoil SE end; F3 background	NNW
DSC_0248-253	Trench 2 natural subsoil SE end; F3 background	NW
DSC_0254-268	Trench 2 natural subsoil SE end; F3 background	NW
DSC_0269-284	Trench 2 F3	SW
DSC_0285-295	Trench 2 F3 foreground; garden soil 5 above natural subsoil (background)	SE
DSC_0296-304	Trench 2 F3	NE
DSC_0305-312	Trench 2 garden soil 5 above natural subsoil	S
DSC_0313-326	Trench 2 garden soil 5 above natural subsoil	NE
DSC_0327-346	Backfilling Trench 2	
DSC_0347-372	Backfilling Trench 1	

