

River Mease, Oakthorpe, Leicestershire

Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief

K. Mapplethorpe

2014

Project Code - RMO
TPA Report No. 159/2014



View of Weir 1, looking south west

Trent & Peak Archaeology
Unit 1, Holly Lane
Chilwell
Nottingham
NG9 4AB
Tel: 0115 896 7400
Email: trentpeak@yorkat.co.uk

© Trent & Peak Archaeology 2014



Quality Assurance

Prepared by	Kate Mapplethorpe, Project Officer
Date	22nd December 2014
Checked by	Steve Malone, Project Manager
Signed	
Date	24th November 2014
Approved by	Lee Elliot, Head of Projects
Signed	
Date	5th January 2015
Report Number	159/2014
Status	Final Report

Disclaimer

This Report has been prepared solely for the person/party which commissioned it and for the specifically titled project or named part thereof referred to in the Report. The Report should not be relied upon or used for any other project by the commissioning person/party without first obtaining independent verification as to its suitability for such other project, and obtaining the prior written approval of York Archaeological Trust for Excavation and Research Limited ("YAT") (trading as Trent & Peak Archaeology) YAT accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this Report being relied upon or used for any purpose other than the purpose for which it was specifically commissioned. Nobody is entitled to rely upon this Report other than the person/party which commissioned it. YAT accepts no responsibility or liability for any use of or reliance upon this Report by anybody other than the commissioning person/party.

Summary

Trench and Peak Archaeology was commissioned by the Environment Agency to undertake an archaeological watching brief during restoration works on the River Mease, Oakthorpe, Leicestershire.

The works included the removal of two early 20th century weirs approximately 400m apart along the course of the river, along with the stripping of areas to the north of the river to increase the capacity of the floodplain. It was possible that archaeological remains might be revealed during the excavations, particularly prehistoric remains relating to a settlement located approximately 500m to the east of the centre of the site.

No archaeological finds or features were uncovered during the excavations; however, ground reduction was in most cases relatively shallow, leaving open the possibility that remains may yet survive at greater depth.

Contents

Disclaimer.....	2
Summary.....	3
Contents.....	4
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Project Background.....	5
3. Historical and Archaeological Background.....	5
4. Objectives.....	5
5. Methodology.....	6
6. Results.....	6
7. Conclusion.....	7
8. Acknowledgements.....	7
Bibliography.....	8

List of Figures

Figure 1: Site Location.....	9
Figure 2: Plan of Weir 1.....	10
Figure 3: Section of Weir 1.....	11
Plate 1: Weir 1 southern wall.....	12
Plate 2: Weir 1 section.....	12
Plate 3: Remains of Weir 1 step after demolition.....	13
Plate 4: Regraded riverbank upstream of Weir 1.....	13
Plate 5: Regraded riverbank upstream of Weir 1.....	14
Plate 6: Weir 2 eastern wall.....	14
Plate 7: Regraded riverbank at site of Weir 2.....	15
Plate 8: Area stripped for lowering of the flood plain.....	15

Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary context list.....	16
---------------------------------------	----

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Trent and Peak Archaeology was contracted by Chris Farmer of the Environment Agency to undertake an archaeological watching brief at the River Mease, Oakthorpe, Leicestershire, during excavations as part of environmental restoration works. The intention of the investigation was to make a record and gain an understanding of any archaeological remains impacted on by the works.

1.2 The works consisted of river bank clearance and regrading along with excavations to increase the capacity of the floodplain. River channel works also included the demolition of two late 19th century or early 20th century weirs situated approximately 400m apart along the course of the River Mease, south-west of the village of Oakthorpe.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1 The development site is located on the River Mease (SK 30897 12302), approximately 1.5km south-west of the village of Oakthorpe. Oakthorpe itself is situated approximately 12km south-east of Burton upon Trent and 25km north-west of Leicester. Topographically, the site is mostly flat.

2.2 The 1:50,000 British Geological Mapping shows that site is situated on solid geology of the Bromsgrove Sandstone Formation overlain by superficial deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel alluvium (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Leicestershire Historic Environment Record (HER) holds a total of 20 records for within a 1km radius of the excavation site. The most significant of these include various cropmarks noted on aerial photography including two prehistoric pit alignments (MLE4782 and MLE4870), a rectangular enclosure (MLE10460), a Bronze Age ring ditch (MLE4784) and a sub-rectangular enclosure (MLE16956). Prehistoric remains were also identified through fieldwalking and geophysics (identifying ditches or gullies), east of the A42 (MLE7663), and through finds of prehistoric flint (MLE16503). Medieval earthworks are also recorded within the 1km radius: remains of a medieval village north of Stretton en le Field (MLE4866), and earthworks and cropmarks related to water management (MLE4872). The historic cores of the villages of Oakthorpe and Stretton en le Field are also mentioned (MLE16891 and MLE9097).

4. OBJECTIVES

4.1 *The objective of the archaeological monitoring can be stated as:*

- To make a record of any archaeological features, deposits or structures impacted upon by the environmental works
- To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains encountered
- To assess the artefactual and environmental potential of the archaeological deposits encountered
- To produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Leicestershire HER

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 *The methodology can be summarised as:*

5.2 At all times the project will follow current IfA best practice as laid out in *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (Institute for Archaeologists 2008).

5.3 Archaeological monitoring and record of all groundworks undertaken on the site. This included bank clearance and regrading and lowering of areas within the floodplain of the river in order to increase the capacity of the flood plain.

5.4 A plan of any archaeological remains was produced. A written, drawn and photographic record was maintained. Drawings were produced at a suitable scale, normally 1:10 or 1:20 for sections and 1:50 for plans.

5.5 Photographic and drawn record was made of the two weir structures prior to demolition. Owing to the limited access this comprised photographic record supported by annotated and measured sketches.

6. RESULTS

6.1 Excavations were undertaken to regrade banks and open up silted channels at various points along the river. These were inspected for any exposure of archaeological materials or deposits. The deposit sequence along the river banks was the same in all cases. The topsoil was a dark brownish black humic silt approximately 0.3m thick containing infrequent inclusions of small pebbles, which was limited to the immediate area of the riverbank. This overlay a subsoil (0002) of mid orangey brown clayish silt which contained infrequent inclusions of small pebbles. This deposit was not fully excavated so the depth was not ascertained (Plates 4, 5, 7).

6.2 Stripping of areas within the floodplain had the aim of slightly deepening wet areas so as to increase the capacity of the floodplain. In practice this involved removing only vegetation and c.300mm topsoil and except in limited areas this did not extend through the full depth of the topsoil (0003), which was here a mid brown clay silt with infrequent inclusions of small stones (Plate 8).

6.3 No finds, features or buried land surfaces were found during these excavations.

6.4 Two weir structures along the course of the river were removed: Weir 1 (0004) and Weir 2 (0005). These weirs were approximately 400m apart and appeared to have an almost identical form (see Figs 3 and 4). Both consisted of two opposing parallel walls, 2.9m-3.0m in length, at least 1.2m in height and 3.1m apart, with angled wings of 1.0m-1.2m. A step spanning the stream connected the two. The walls were constructed of a double skin of red bricks 225mm x 105mm x 70mm in size, laid in an English bond pattern. There was a minimum of 15 courses in Weir 1 and 20 courses in Weir 2. The walls were topped by a semi-circular capping stone. The weir step was also constructed of a double skin of red bricks, but with a maximum of four courses, and was 14 bricks wide. As the level of the stream had not been lowered it was not possible to see the exact construction of the wall and step below this level. A section of large-diameter ceramic pipe was found beneath Weir 1 which appeared disused (no additional connecting pieces were retrieved). It is not clear what the purpose of the pipe was, but it did not appear to be older than the 20th century.

6.5 Archive Statement

River Mease, Oakthorpe
Trent and Peak Archaeology code: RMO

The archive will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums Service and a digital copy of the report will be deposited with Leicester HER.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Despite the previous record of prehistoric remains within the general vicinity of the excavations, no evidence of prehistoric settlement or land use was found within the excavated areas. However, regrading of the river banks did not involve significant removal of topsoil and the level of the wider stripped areas within the floodplain was reduced by no more than 300mm, so there is a possibility that archaeological remains may yet be present and survive undisturbed.

7.2 The two weirs were found to be of almost identical construction, suggesting that they were constructed at or around the same time. Nothing is indicated at these locations on large scale mapping of the later 19th century, but footbridges (no longer evident) are marked on the 1923 Ordnance Survey 25" mapping. It seems likely that these footbridges were associated with the weir structures and that they were originally constructed at some time in the early 20th century.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Trent & Peak Archaeology would like to thank Chris Farmer of the Environment Agency for commissioning the work and providing background information. We would also like to thank Richard Clarke of Leicestershire County Council for his advice.

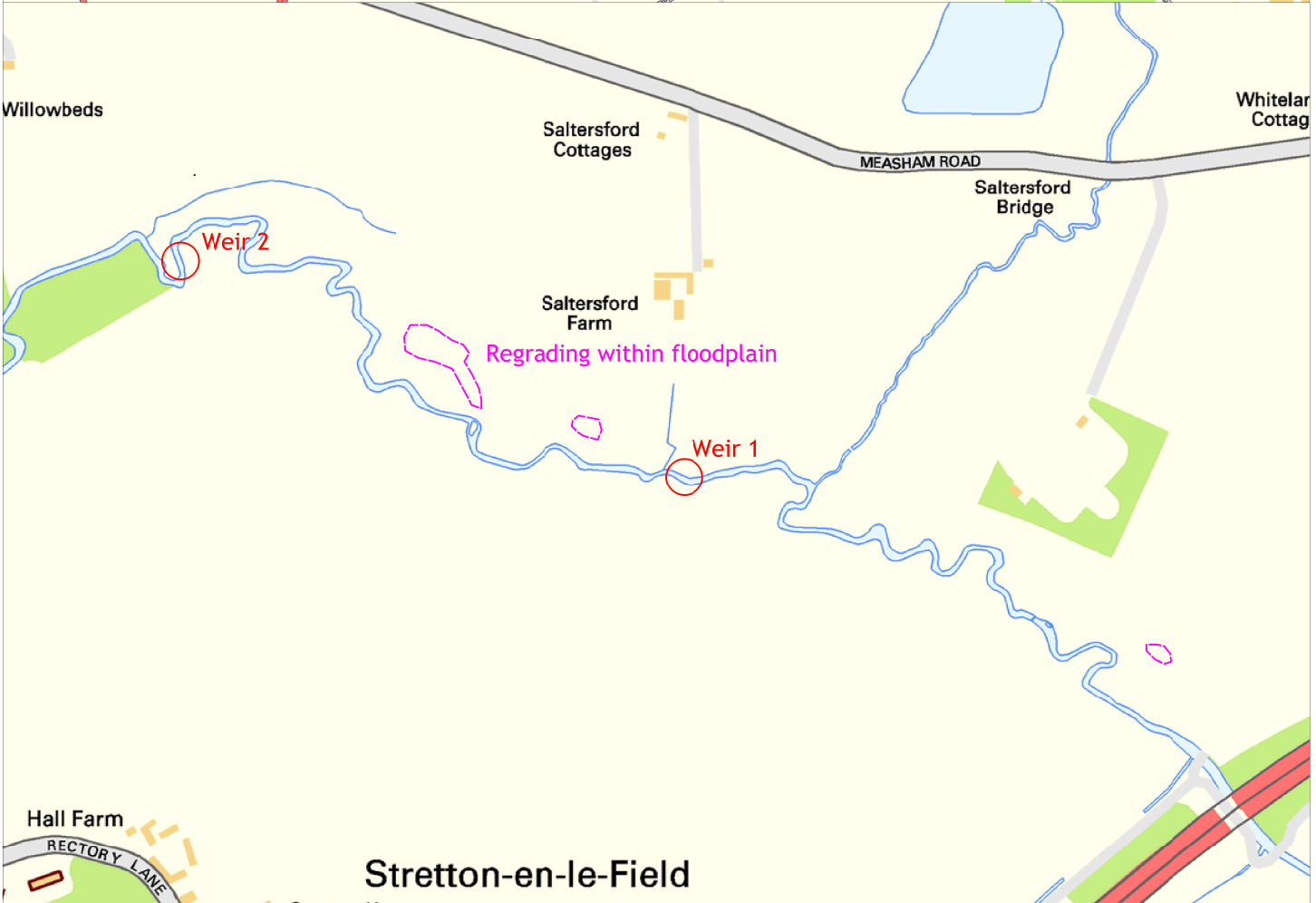
Bibliography

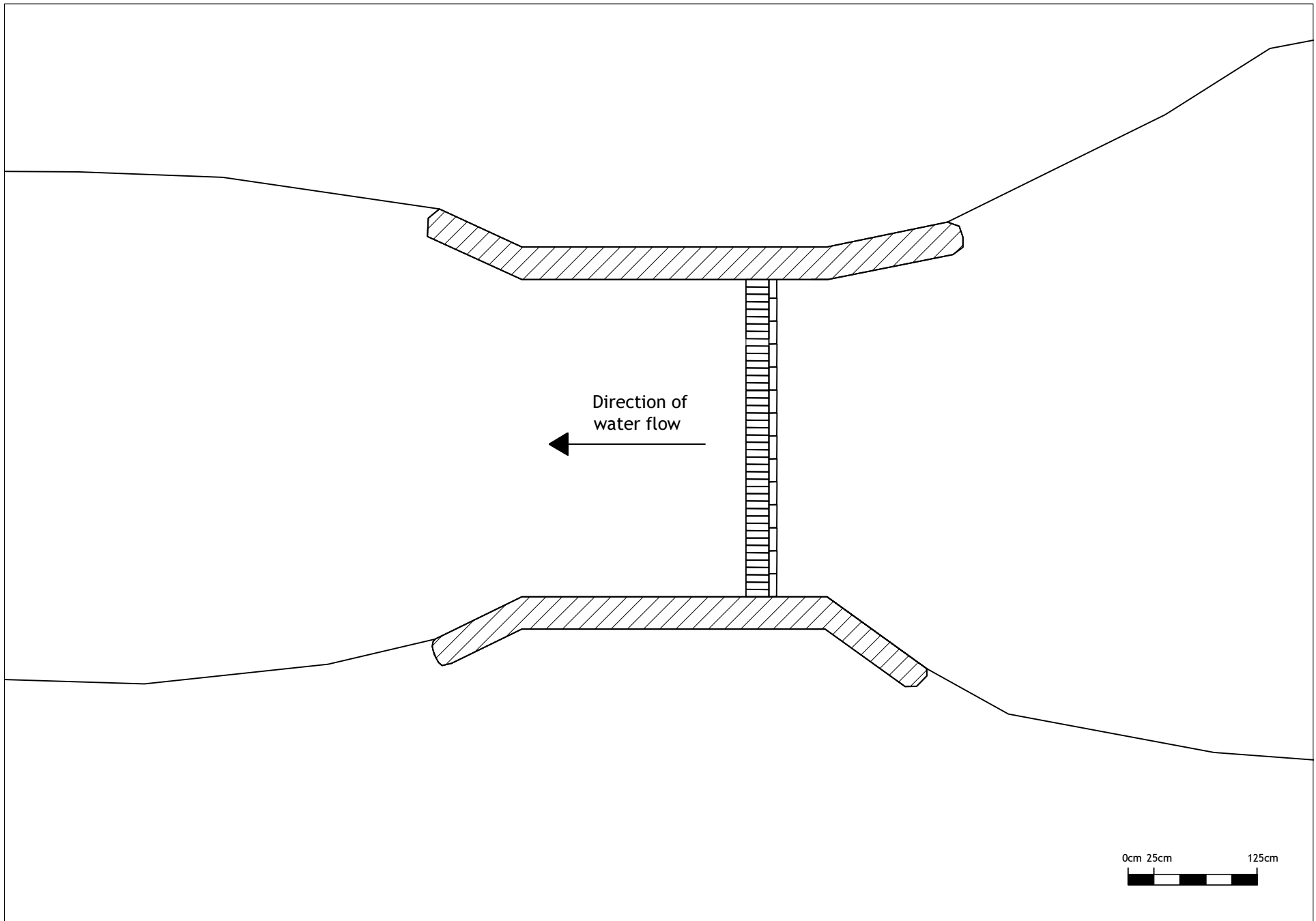
<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

Brown, D. 2007 *Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation*, Archaeological Archives Forum.

Institute for Archaeologists, 2008. *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*. Institute for Archaeologists, Reading.

Knight, Vyner and Allen 2012 *East Midlands Heritage An Updated Research Agenda for the Historic Environment in the East Midlands*, Buxton Press.





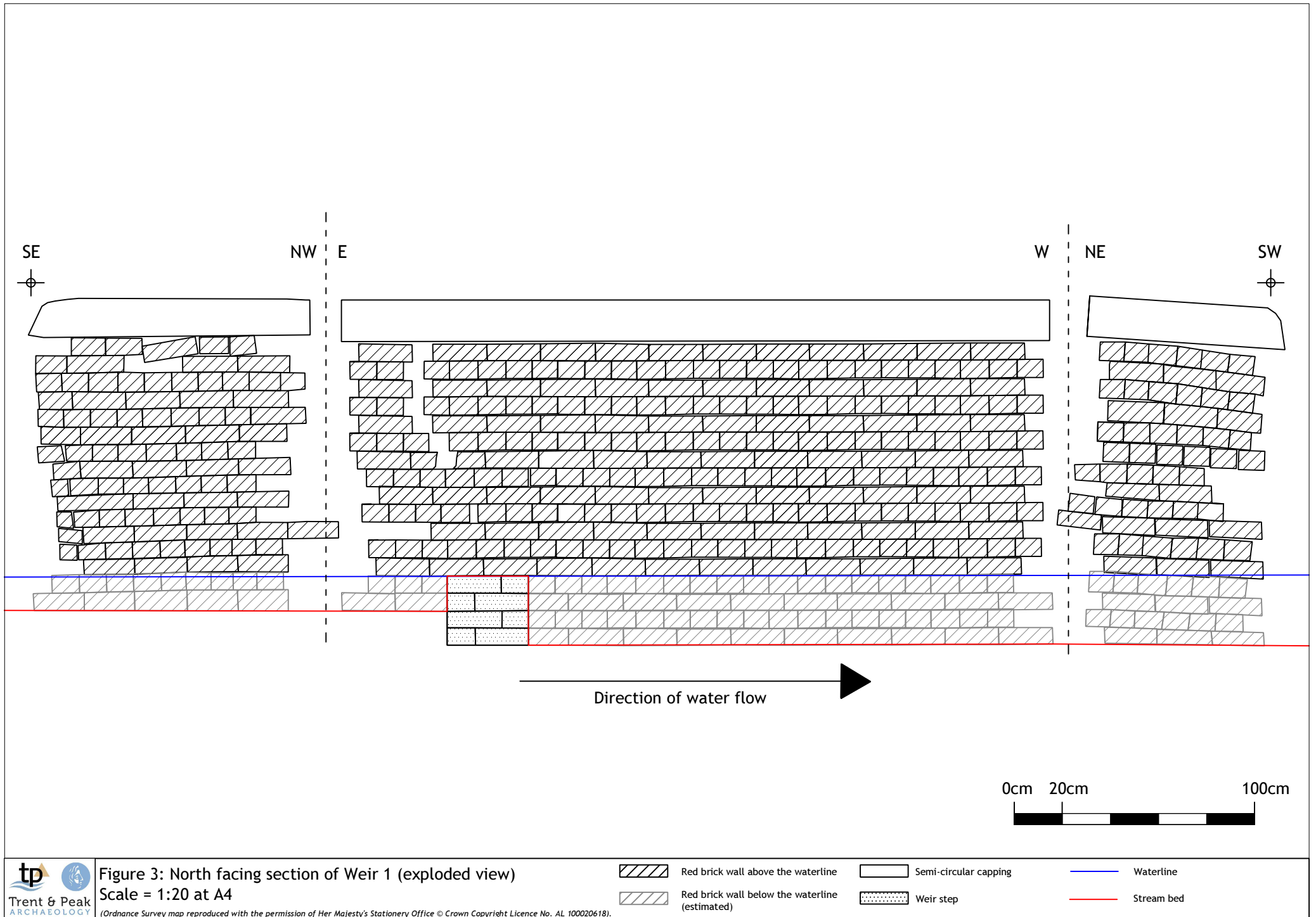


Figure 3: North facing section of Weir 1 (exploded view)
 Scale = 1:20 at A4

(Ordnance Survey map reproduced with the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright Licence No. AL 100020618).



Plate 1: Weir 1 southern wall, looking south west.



Plate 2: Weir 1 step



Plate 3: Remains of Weir 1 step after demolition, with ceramic pipe



Plate 4: Regraded riverbank upstream of Weir 1



Plate 5: Regraded riverbank upstream of Weir 1



Plate 6: Weir 2 looking east



Plate 7: Regraded riverbank at site of Weir 2



Plate 8: Area stripped for the lowering of the flood plain

Appendix 1: Summary context list.

Context	Description
0001	Humic topsoil on riverbank
0002	Subsoil
0003	Topsoil away from riverbank
0004	Weir 1
0005	Weir 2