

Further Archaeological Observation at The Tiny Tim's Children's Centre, Whitefriars Lane, Coventry



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Summary

Archaeological observation at The Tiny Tim Children's Centre, Whitefriars Lane, Coventry, which was at the northern edge of the precinct of the medieval Carmelite Friary, revealed the masonry foundations of the precinct wall, which extended along the street frontage of Whitefriars Lane and had been rebuilt, at least in part, in the post-medieval period. Evidence for several post-medieval rubbish pits was also revealed. A single partially surviving grave was also revealed and this may be part of a medieval burial ground at the edge of the Friary precinct.

1. Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Coventry City Council for the erection of an extension to the front of the Tiny Tim Children's Centre, Whitefriars Lane, Coventry (Planning Ref. R/2008/1517). Since the site lies within an area of archaeological potential, close to the boundary of medieval Whitefriars, it was considered that medieval archaeological deposits associated with the precinct of Whitefriars monastery might be disturbed during the work. It was therefore a condition of planning permission that the applicant should secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the development.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of the foundation trenches for the new extension, in accordance with a Brief prepared by the Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority, was commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum Field Archaeology Projects Group and carried out in August 2009. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be deposited with Coventry City Museums Service under the site code WL09.

2. Location

2.1 The site is located at national grid reference SP 3393 7873 on the south side of Whitefriars Lane, within the city of Coventry (Fig 1). The development area was previously within a yard or pavement area immediately north of The Tiny Tim Children's Centre.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Mercia Mudstone (British Geological Survey 1994).

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 The site is situated in the south-eastern part of the medieval town of Coventry, which developed during the 9th to 12th centuries and this part of the town was also the site of the Carmelite Friary of Whitefriars. The friary (City of Coventry Historic Environment Record HER MCT 689) was founded in 1342 (VCH 1969). The surviving buildings of the friary include the Chapter House and east range of the Cloisters and other buildings lay to the south-east of the present site. The precinct of the friary probably extended from Much Park Street to Gulson Road and the site was almost certainly at the northern limit of the precinct of the friary (Fig. 1).

3.2 The standing remains of the cloister wing of the Carmelite friary, now Whitefriars Museum, lie less than 100m away to the south-east (HER MCT 850); however the building was separated from Whitefriars Lane by the construction of the ring road in the later 20th century. The medieval Whitefriars Gateway, dating to 1352, lies to the south-west of the site; it is now a toy museum.

3.3 Previous observation of an earlier extension to the Tiny Tim Children’s Centre revealed evidence of the foundation of the medieval friary precinct wall (Warwickshire Museum 2003). An archaeological evaluation was recently completed of a stretch of the town and precinct wall at Gulson Road; however no evidence for the foundations of the town wall and Friary precinct wall was revealed (Warwickshire Museum 2009).

3.4 Excavations have also been carried out in the vicinity of the site, which have revealed medieval remains. At 114-115 Gosford Street, to the north, of 12th-/13th-century pits were uncovered, along with traces of medieval ridge and furrow (HER No. 684). Excavations to the west, at the former Green Dragon Inn, revealed beam slots and postholes relating to a possible medieval building; a silver penny of Edwards I and a coin dating to 1320 were retrieved from the remains of a stone building (HER. 733). Excavations in 1994/5 on the east side of Whitefriars Street (HER 76) uncovered the back of plots and extensive medieval pitting with evidence for occupation dating back to the early 12th century (Coventry Museums Archaeology Unit 1995).

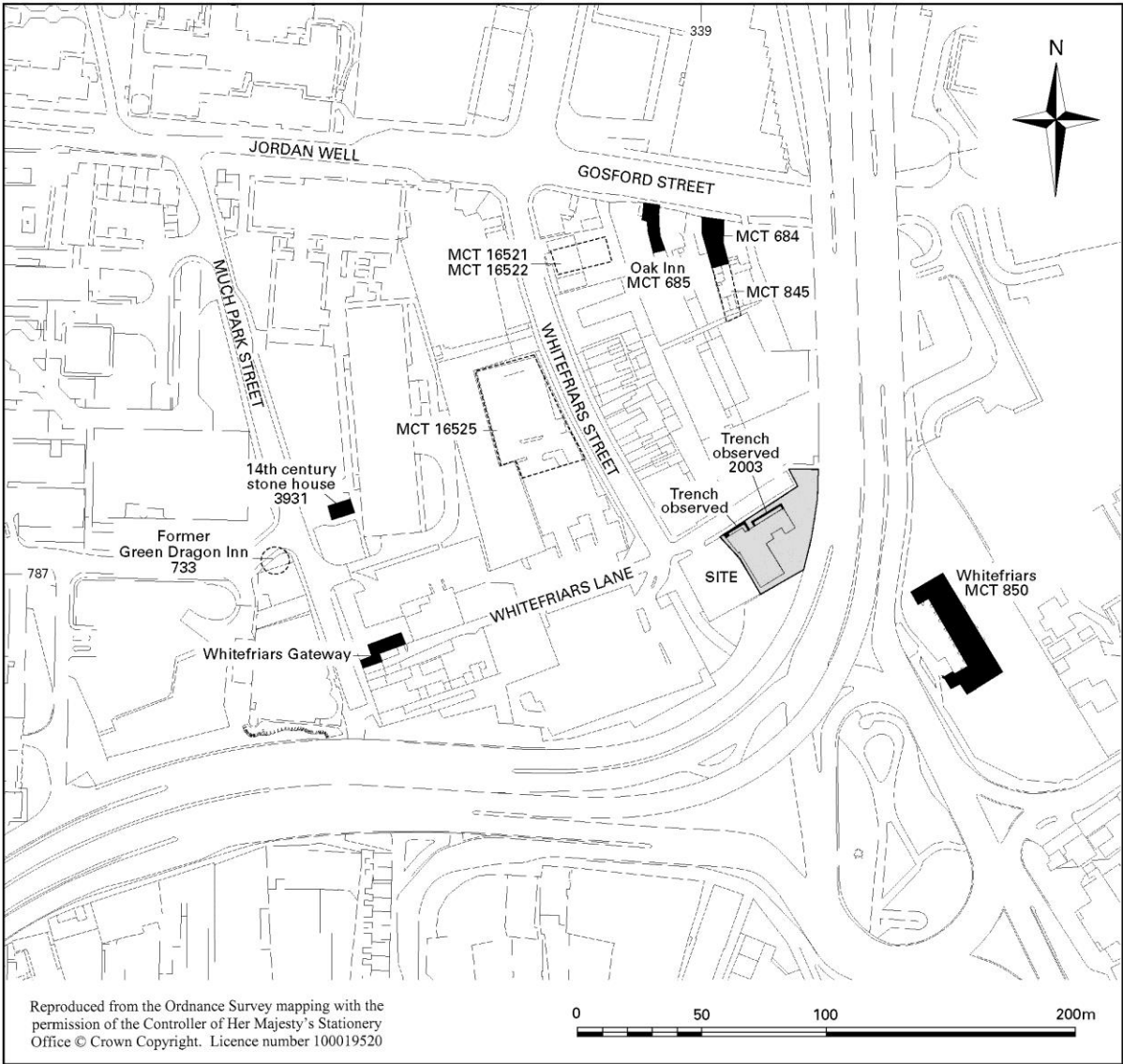


Fig 1: Site location

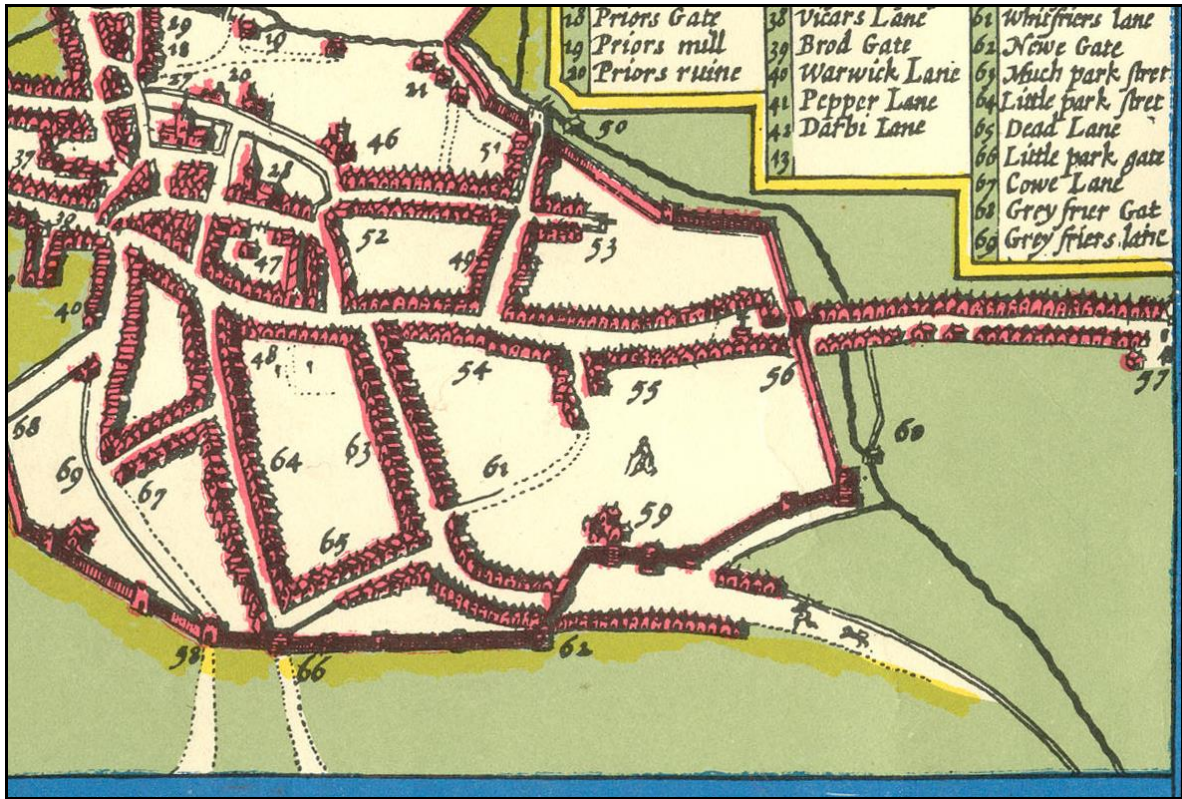


Fig. 2: Detail from Speed's map of Coventry, 1610

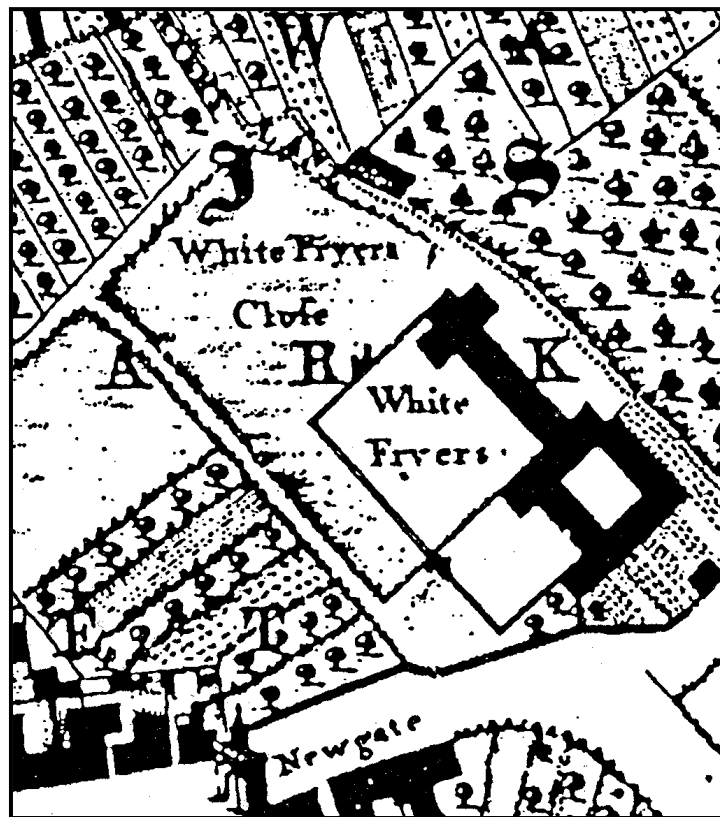


Fig 3: Detail from Bradford's map of Coventry 1748-9



Fig 4: Detail from Sharpe's map of Coventry, 1807



Fig 5: Detail from the Ordnance Survey 1:500 map of 1905

3.5 A stone house of 14th century date, comprising a first floor chamber and a stone-vaulted cellar, was revealed to the west of the site after bombing in 1941 (HER No. 3931). 114-115 Gosford Street, to the north, is a timber-framed medieval building which has been re-cased in brick and faced in stucco (HER No. 684). The Oak Inn, at 120 Gosford Street is another surviving timber-framed building in the vicinity (HER No. 684). An archaeological evaluation on the west side of Whitefriars Street in 2002 (HER MCT 16521) recorded evidence for medieval backyard or agricultural activity and a post-Dissolution boundary wall (ULAS 2002).

3.6 Speed's 1610 town plan of Coventry shows Whitefriars (Fig 2, '*White fryers*' 59) and the friary precinct. The frontages of Jordan Well and Much Park Street were built up but there were no structures in the vicinity of the development area (Speed 1610). Bradford's map of Coventry of 1748-9 shows that the development area lies in the northern part of Whitefriars Close (Fig 3). The Board of Health map of 1851 shows that the eastern side of Whitefriars Street had been developed and the northern part of what was Whitefriars Close had been divided into five linear areas running roughly NW-SE. These appear to have been under cultivation in the mid 19th century. Between 1889 and 1937 (Ordnance Survey 1889; Fig 5; 1905, 1906; 1914; 1925; 1937) the frontage of the site remained unoccupied, with an internally buttressed wall running around the perimeter. The central part of the site was taken up by the north-western part of a large building, demolished in the mid 20th century. The 1955 Ordnance Survey map shows a small building marked the "Polish Ex-Servicemen's Club" on the street frontage within the same compound.

4. Observation

4.1 An archaeological watching brief was conducted during work to excavate the foundation trenches for the proposed extension during August 2009. The excavation of the foundation trenches was carried out using a mini-excavator with a toothless bucket. The trenches were approximately 0.7m wide and were between 1.7m and 1.9m deep from the original ground level. The trench ran along the line of the former street frontage (Fig. 4) and some minimal ground reduction of 0.3m or less took place within the proposed new building footprint.

Geological Natural

4.2 A layer of reddish brown sandy clay (26) was recorded intermittently in the north-western end of the trench at between c.1.2m to 1.6m below the current ground surface. This was overlaid by an apparently extensive layer of reddish brown silty clay (25). This was 0.3m thick and contained very few inclusions and both these deposits were geological natural clays, probably associated with the underlying Mercia Mudstone (British Geological Survey 1994).

Medieval/Post-Medieval

4.3 The natural clay was overlaid by extensive deposits which may have been subject to some disturbance during the post-medieval and later periods. In the north-west corner of the trench a not fully discernible cut was revealed which contained human remains including partially articulated right and left side fibulae, tibia, tarsals and metatarsals. The exact relationship of these remains was partially lost due to an extensive section collapse of the north side the trench. The discovery of human remains was reported to the local Coroner who examined the remains and deemed them to be of sufficient antiquity to require no further investigation. The archaeological evidence did not include direct dating as no finds were associated with the probable grave fill; however the burial did predate the wall foundation (2) and deposits (6) beneath the wall. It would seem likely that that the burial may be medieval and be related to a Friary burial ground.



Fig 7: Rubble deposit 9 and dump deposits 27 and 28 in section

4.4 A rubble deposit composed of several faced and other rough sandstone fragments was revealed (9). This was 0.7m wide and extended across the width of the trench on a roughly north south orientation (Fig 7). This deposit was disturbed and cut by a later pits, but there were no obvious structural characteristics and although it could potentially have functioned as a foundation it is more probably a dump or remnant of a levelling deposit.

4.5 A layer of reddish brown silty clay 0.15m thick (16) butted up to rubble 9. The layer was overlaid by a 0.08m thick layer of dark grey silt with charcoal fragments appeared to partly overlie rubble 9 and extend 2m further to the south-west.

4.6 A large pit (13) which was at least 3m wide and 1m deep had been dug through earlier deposits into the natural clays (Fig 9, Section A). It was filled by loose sandstone rubble with reddish brown sandy silt (12) which contained no discernible worked sandstone fragments, but several sherds of post-medieval coarseware were recovered. This section was subject to extensive collapse during the course of the excavation of the trench.

4.7 Further towards the south-western end of the trench dump deposits of greyish brown sandy clay (27) and reddish brown clay with light brown sandy clay (28). These sloped from east to west and may indicate tip lines. These may well be the fills of another large pit.

Post-medieval

4.8 A sandstone wall foundation (2) was revealed along the trench and at the edge of the site (Fig 8). The wall extended for at least 10m and measured 0.75m wide and 0.35m thick. The base of the foundation was constructed approximately 0.7m below present ground level (Fig 9, Section C). The wall comprised at least two and in places three courses of rough cut, but faced sandstone blocks with a rubble and mortar core.



Fig 8: Wall foundation 2

4.9 This wall is exactly on the line of the wall (WL03, 102) recorded during work carried out on the site in 2003 (Warwickshire Museum 2003). The continued extent of this wall would confirm its most likely function as that of the foundation of the precinct wall of the Friary. The wall was disturbed or partially removed at the south-western end of the trench where later construction or service installation had occurred. The wall itself is likely to have been repaired and or partly rebuilt in the period after the original construction. The wall was recorded prior to its removal during excavation of the foundation trench (Figs. 6 and 7). The wall did not continue to the north-east end of the trench where it had probably been destroyed by 20th-century building activity.

4.10 The wall foundation 2 was overlaid by a layer of dark grey sandy clay (4) and a 0.15m thick layer of grey brown silt clay loam (3) which contained 19th-century pottery. These layers were most probably levelling deposits following the dismantling or destruction of the wall.

4.11 The wall foundation continued, albeit partially disturbed, beyond the western limit of the site. A layer or possible fill of dark grey brown clay loam (31) occurred adjacent to the wall (Fig 10). A similar layer (14) possibly a continuation of 31 contained 19th-century pottery and glass fragments.

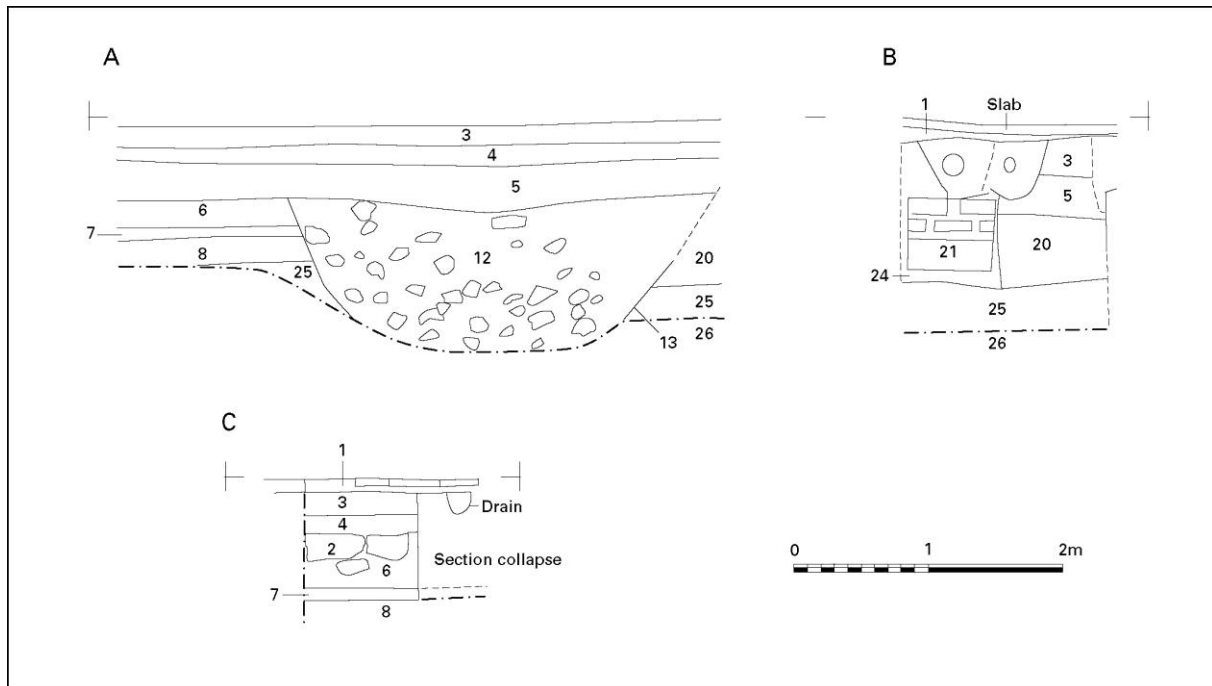


Fig 9: Sections A-C

Modern Features

4.12 At the south-western end of the trench a brick lined inspection chamber (22) was revealed. The construction cut (23) was 1m long and 0.75m wide and was constructed against the existing concrete foundations of the Tiny Tim Centre building and cut in to or butted up to the southern side of wall (2). Further to the east modern services including drains and an electricity cable and trench (10 and 11) cut through wall 2.

4.13 The concrete and brick foundations (21) for a south-west to north-east aligned wall were revealed at the eastern end of the trench. This was parallel to the walls of the existing building. The construction cut for the wall foundation and backfill deposit (24) was also recorded. The existing concrete foundations for the Tiny Tim Centre were revealed at the ends of the trench. These foundations cut into the upper sequence of deposits; however no detailed recording was undertaken. Further drains associated with the existing building were also revealed in this part of the trench.

4.14 The proposed extension footprint was covered by a layer of grey brown silt clay loam (3) containing 19th- and 20th-century pottery sherds. This was overlaid by a 0.1m thick layer of sand and brick rubble (1), which also formed the make up deposit for paving slabs forming the current ground surface.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Archaeological recording at the Tiny Tim Children's Centre has shown that the remains of a wall foundation extended along the Whitefriars Lane street frontage for at least 26m. This almost certainly follows the line of the northern limit of the friary precinct now indicated by the line of Whitefriars Lane itself. This may incorporate the remains of the medieval foundations of the former priory precinct wall and may well include some of the original wall foundation and a wall was still standing along this boundary in the 20th century. However, the presence of a post-medieval pit clearly shows that part of this stretch of wall was constructed in the 19th/20th



Fig 10: Showing the continuation of wall 2 and layer 31

century. This is similar to other lengths of the precinct wall, such as at Gulson Road, which was also subject to some rebuilding. It is likely that the wall along Whitfriars Lane was variously either repaired, partially or wholly rebuilt during the 16th to 19th centuries.

5.2 At least one large pit pre-dated the precinct wall and other recorded deposits may actually be fills of other pits. These may have been large rubbish pits within or on the boundaries of former medieval properties.

5.3 A possible medieval burial was also partially revealed and this may possibly be associated with the Friary or other burial ground.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Date/Comments</i>
u/s	Tile	2	18th/19th-century (not retained)
1	Pottery	14	19th-century
	Glass	5	Vessel fragments
	Clay pipe	1	Stem
3	Pottery	1	19th-century
	Glass	4	18th/19th-century
12	Pottery	6	18th/19th-century
14	Glass	16	Vessel fragments
	Pottery	6	19th-century
17	Human bone	2	Fibula and tibia fragments (not retained and reinterred on site)

u/s = unstratified

Appendix B: List of Contexts

- 1 layer
- 2 Sandstone wall foundation
- 3 Layer of mixed dark grey brown silt loam
- 4 Dark grey sandy clay
- 5 Layer of grey brown silty sand
- 6 Layer of grey brown silty clay
- 7 Layer of dark grey silt
- 8 Layer of grey brown silty clay
- 9 Sandstone rubble ?foundation/?levelling
- 10 Modern service trench
- 11 Cut for inspection chamber 110
- 12 Fill of pit/ditch 13
- 13 Large pit or ditch
- 14 Layer of brown grey silty loam
- 15 Layer of light brown silty rubble
- 16 Layer of silty loam with rubble
- 17 Grave fill
- 18 Human skeletal remains
- 19 Grave cut
- 20 Grey brown silty clay
- 21 Concrete /brick wall foundation
- 22 Brick lining (inspection chamber)
- 23 Construction cut and backfill for 21
- 24 Fill of cut 123 (as 103)
- 25 Natural reddish brown silty clay
- 26 Natural reddish brown sandy clay
- 27 Layer
- 28 Layer Light brown sandy clay
- 29 Not used
- 30 Possible pit
- 31 Dark grey brown clay loam (same as 14)