

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION  
TRENCHING AT THURSTON COURT  
SEVERNSIDE SOUTH  
BEWDLEY  
WORCESTERSHIRE



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# Archaeological Evaluation Trenching at Thurston Court, Sevenside South, Bewdley Worcestershire

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## 1 Summary

*An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Thurston Court Sevenside South, Bewdley, Worcestershire prior to proposed construction of an additional dwelling. The plot occupies the site of an earlier building or sequence of buildings first appearing on the 1840s Tithes Awards plan. The fragmentary surviving walls of the structure indicate that it was at least 1 ½ storeys, but subsequently reduced to a single storey garage or workshop by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The plot was cleared on completion of the 1990s redevelopment of the Thurston Hotel site.*

*A single trench was excavated broadly along the line of the proposed eastern wall of the new dwelling. Whilst the trench was not excavated under archaeological supervision it was deliberately restricted to the depth of modern/recent overburden overlying a brick floor previously observed in a small hand dug test pit. There was some concern that the brick floor might seal a concealed cellar vault – this proved not to be the case. The test trench was subsequently widened and cleaned to permit archaeological recording. Additional pits were dug within the trench to confirm the depth of deposits over natural clay, and establish whether the brick floor concealed any pre 19<sup>th</sup> Century deposits.*

*No archaeologically significant deposits were encountered within the proposed development area. The adjacent standing walls are of some limited archaeological interest and will be retained in the new development. It appears probable that the earlier brick surface relates to a late 18<sup>th</sup> C structure, refloored and possibly adapted to a workshop in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It is likely that the building was reduced to a single storey single pitch roofed workshop or garage in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and removed when the site was cleared on completion of renovation and remodelling of the neighbouring buildings in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This report represents the findings of an archaeological evaluation at Thurston Court Sevenside South, Bewdley Thurston Court, Sevenside South, Bewdley. The plot stands in an area developed as wharfage in the post medieval period, reputedly latterly used by a tannery. The proposed new dwelling lies between Eastham Cottage and 9 Thurston Court SO 378848 275236 Planning refs WF 20/0573/FUL, and LBC 20/0587/

LBC. The project has been commissioned by Ralph Round (the Client). The project design has been prepared in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and English Heritage's *Understanding historic buildings – a guide to good recording practice (2006)*.(NGR) The project also met the requirements and guidelines for Archaeological Projects in Worcestershire.

- 2.2 The frontage building is Grade II Listed – the buildings within the courtyard may be assumed to be curtilage Listed:

*SEVERN SIDE SOUTH No 26 (Thurston Hotel) 22.4.50 GV II*

*House, now hotel. 1775 with mid-C19 and some late C20 alterations. Brick with hipped tile roof. Three storeys on cellars, five windows, central range recessed, two sides have brick parapets with stone pediments, windows arranged 2:1:2, plate glass sashes; central window has French casement opening onto C20 wrought iron balcony, all with rubbed brick heads; ground floor: central entrance has a stone pedimented doorcase with engaged Doric columns, door of two leaves, each with two raised and fielded panels. Interior: open well staircase with moulded ramped handrail, turned balusters and open string.*

*Listing NGR: SO7887375244*

- 2.3 The quayside immediately to the east of the entrance of Thurston Court is also Listed Grade II (WSM17531)

### **3 Aims**

- 3.1 The aims of the evaluation trenching were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of the deposits beneath the existing hardstanding in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature of the resource (including character, extent, date, state of preservation and quality). The purpose of an archaeological project (as defined by CIFA) is “to examine the archaeological resource in a given area or site within a framework of defined research objectives, to seek a better understanding of and compile a lasting record of that resource, to analyze and interpret the results, and disseminate them”

### **4 Methodology**

- 4.1 The site was initially examined after excavation of a small hand dug engineer's test pit in (date). The test pit exposed the presence of a brick surface at a depth of circa 0.6m, sealed by demolition rubble and make up for the present yard surface. Probable natural deposits were present around 1m below current yard level, but within the limitations of the small pit it was not possible to confirm that the material was undisturbed natural. Subsequently a narrow machine dug trench was excavated across the area of insitu brick floor to inform foundation proposals. This trench was then widened and cleaned and sample areas dug down to the underlying natural in (date)

- 4.2 The majority of recording was undertaken photographically, the trench plan and section were recorded at 1:20. The digital images are presented with hard copies of this report on DVD.

## 5 Cartographic evidence

- 5.1 Unusually for a town of Bewdley's importance there is very little cartographic or pictorial evidence for the town before the 19th century. The 1843 Bewdley Tithe Awards Plan reveals that the presently proposed development area was, in the 1840s, largely occupied by buildings situated at the rear of two separate properties located on Severnside South. The plot of the presently proposed dwelling is shown as being built up by 1843. The later cartographic evidence adds little to the interpretation of the site – the present building footprint having been unaltered since the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey, other than enlargement of the street access in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and demolition of the single storey workshop (in the 1990s) recorded on recent mapping.

## 6 Historical background

- 6.1 The town of Bewdley has its origins in the late medieval period and developed as a borough and inland port on the River Severn during the 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century it had become a prosperous and important centre for river trade between the Midlands and Bristol, Bewdley being the head of navigation for medium sized vessels. This wealth was reflected in the architecture of the town with new construction as well as remodelling of earlier buildings in brick. After this period of prosperity Bewdley began to experience economic decline following the construction of a canal junction at nearby Stourport in 1768.
- 6.2 Severnside South developed in post-medieval period as a result of quayside and bridge-head development to the west of the original settlement of Bewdley. The first bridge across the Severn was stone and built in 1447 in the same place as the present bridge. During the Wars of the Roses this was destroyed by the Lancastrians. It was rebuilt in timber, but in 1483 a new stone bridge was constructed a little further downstream. A market place was established in Lode Street by 1539 and the area regained prominence with the replacement of Bewdley Bridge in 1798 at the eastern end of the street. The area flourished in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries with extensive river trade, Bewdley being the head of navigation for medium sized vessels.
- 6.3 The present street layout was likely settled in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when settlement became refocused nearer to the river as a result of quayside and bridge-head development to the west of the new bridge crossing. This replaced the earlier linear settlement and marketplace situated along Wyre hill. The Load Street area was developed during this period with tenement plots (WSM19351) laid out along the road from the later 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Medieval activities in the area to the south of the street and around the original bridgehead on Severnside South possibly included industrial sites such as quays, warehousing and tanneries as well as domestic buildings.

- 6.4 Whilst there is little published archaeological evidence it is likely that the present Thurston Court site was at least partially developed by the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, as

other buildings in Severnside South have proved to contain 17<sup>th</sup> Century elements (albeit all closer to the bridge). The development of the present frontage building (not internally examined) in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century was presumably preceded by an earlier structure as the cottages within Thurston Court clearly contain some early-mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century brick elements. Bewdley is unusual in that many of the backplots of the riverside properties were occupied by secondary "courtyard" dwellings from an early date, access being through a number of side passages, almost all too narrow for vehicular traffic.

## 7 Previous archaeological work

7.1 A watching brief at 67 Load Street (WSM 72709; Napthan, 2020) revealed naturally accumulated levels of alluvium which predated the riverside settlement. The earliest cut feature was a shallow and irregular foundation trench containing a rubble stone foundation which was probably a sleeper wall for a timber framed structure or internal wall. Whilst no datable material was recovered an early post-medieval date was assumed. Excavations to the west of the site at 27 Dog Lane (Miller et al, 2003) found no evidence of medieval activity and only limited evidence for 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> activity, including hornworking WSM58081, on or near the site. There was however evidence of road widening and heightening in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An evaluation and watching brief at Severn Side South (Miller and Darch, 2002) revealed the wall of a late medieval structure located next to the bridge as well as evidence of an earlier quay.

7.2 The wall of a late medieval structure next to Bewdley bridge and evidence of an earlier quay was revealed during a series of watching briefs at Severn Side South (WSM 31934; Miller and Darch, 2002). This was later identified as a composite structure dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century which also incorporated the initial pier of the third medieval bridge built in 1483 (WSM 33595; Bridge et al, 2006). The remains of several 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings were also recorded and a timber structure identified as a jetty located in the river bed was dated to the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

7.3 Associated groundworks at Severn Side North (WSM 31563; Miller and Darch, 2002) identified fragments of timbers brought up by piling which were similar to intact timbers found on Severn Side South and believed to be part of the medieval quay. These were overlain by a late 19<sup>th</sup> century wall and a reworked deposit. Some undated structural remains were found in proximity to the present bridge and may be associated with construction of it in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

7.4 Further to the south of the town centre, despite a tannery being indicated on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map, an evaluation of land off Lax Lane identified no evidence of tanning (WSM 68375; Crooks, 2017). Two small pits or postholes containing post-medieval pottery and ceramic material were revealed but the similarity of the fill to the above deposited subsoil indicated they may have been cut through that material. A section of post-medieval wall was discovered but no other features of archaeological note. Tanneries generally included large areas used solely for storage of bark, so may leave minimal physical evidence in the archaeological record.

7.5 During a programme of historic building recording and archaeological watching briefs at The George Hotel, 64 Load Street (WSM 10754; Tyler 2007), five phases of development were recorded. The original part of the building was constructed in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century as a bakery and additions to the rear of the building were made in the late 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century after it

had become a hotel. Three areas were observed during a watching brief to the rear of the building. Black silt and degraded sandstone and rubble was observed to a depth of 0.50 metres overlain by the modern concrete surface, and an occupation layer of light brown yellow silty clay with charcoal mottling was encountered at 0.78 metres in Area 1. No significant structures were observed. Two further test-pits within the building encountered the natural grey sandstone at 1.20 metres overlain by natural red sand.

7.6 Archaeological watching briefs at the site of the medical centre in Dog Lane (WSM 66226) and on the line of the Bewdley to Kidderminster water main (WSM 32081), and at 11 Severnside North (WSM 33825) all identified no features or deposits of archaeological interest..

## 8 Site Description

8.1 The development site is surrounded on three sides by standing brickwork primarily of 18<sup>th</sup> Century date with some 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> C modifications. The wall to the north retains higher ground, the side walls to the plot are part of the neighbouring cottages. In the eastern boundary of the plot there is an arch feature (Figure 6), and the low height of this arch raised speculation that there might be former cellarge on the proposed development plot. As the arch appears to be too low for that interpretation it may possibly be a relieving arch built across a soft spot (such as a former well). The area is outside the intended development footprint, and immediately beneath the party wall, so was not explored further.

8.1 Natural deposits, context (100) consisting of a soft tan brown mottled sandy clay were encountered within 1m of current ground surface levels. The observed natural deposits towards the northern end of the trench were more gravelly and very compact. Natural deposits at the southern end of the trench were rather lower, but this section of trench had suffered some previous disturbance, so it is probable that the original natural horizon had been truncated (Fig 6).

8.2 In the northern half of the trench natural deposits were overlaid by a mid brown loamy soil (101) with the appearance of a garden or cultivation soil. As there was no blending of this material with the underlying natural, and no subsoil appeared to be present it is likely that the cultivation soil had developed elsewhere prior to being deposited in this location. The soil contained no dateable artefacts, only very sparse tile and mortar flecks. The absence of greenish traces of cess makes it improbable that the material was “back plot” deposits traditionally associated with medieval burgage plots.

8.3 Layers of ashy material mixed with lime mortar, tile and brick fragments (102) appear to represent a construction or levelling episode. The presence of clay tobacco pipe stem, slate and small fragments of window and vessel glass indicate a late 18<sup>th</sup> Century or later date. It would appear probable that context (102) was deposited shortly before the laying of the overlying brick surface (103).

8.4 A continuous brick paved surface (103) was encountered across the northern three quarters of the trench area. The bricks were unfrogged soft red bricks of early 19<sup>th</sup> Century character. The paved area was rather un-even and had settled in places. The character of the surface might be that of a humble internal domestic floor, but more probably relates to a workshop or yard surface. The absence of any surface “trample” suggests that the floor weathered for some time before levels were raised in this area.

8.5 Deposits above the paved surface (104) consisted primarily of demolition debris of earl-mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century character. The material included window glass, plaster, lime mortar, slate and brick (18<sup>th</sup> C to mid 20<sup>th</sup> C. Towards the southern end of the trench there was a large area of loose loamy soils in an irregular feature that cut the brick paved surface (103) the disturbance appears to also cut the relatively recent material context (104).

8.6 The entire area of the proposed development is covered by a relatively thin (0.1-0.15m) patchy brick surface overlaid and patched with concrete (105)

## 9 Discussion and Conclusions

9.1 The development site may be readily demonstrated to have been previously occupied by buildings, but the surviving standing and buried remains are not sufficient to precisely determine the original form and function. The building appears to have originated in the later 18<sup>th</sup> Century and have been at least 1½ storeys. The houses to the east appear to have been originally 2½ storeys, and there are original window openings that open onto the present development site, making it improbable that the original building was built up against the boundary of No 9 nor of equal height.

9.2 The presence of a probable relieving arch in the boundary of No 9 may indicate the former presence of a soft-spot, potentially in this context a well. Fortunately the position of the possible soft-spot lies outside the planned building footprint

9.3 It would appear that most of the made ground at this point consists of demolition debris relating either to the building that formerly stood on the site or possibly derived from late 19<sup>th</sup> Century renovations to the Thurston Hotel. The archaeological interest of the site is limited to the former presence of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century building two walls of which survive and will be retained in the proposed scheme/

## 10 Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Steve Greybanks of Central Building Design and the landowner Ralph Round

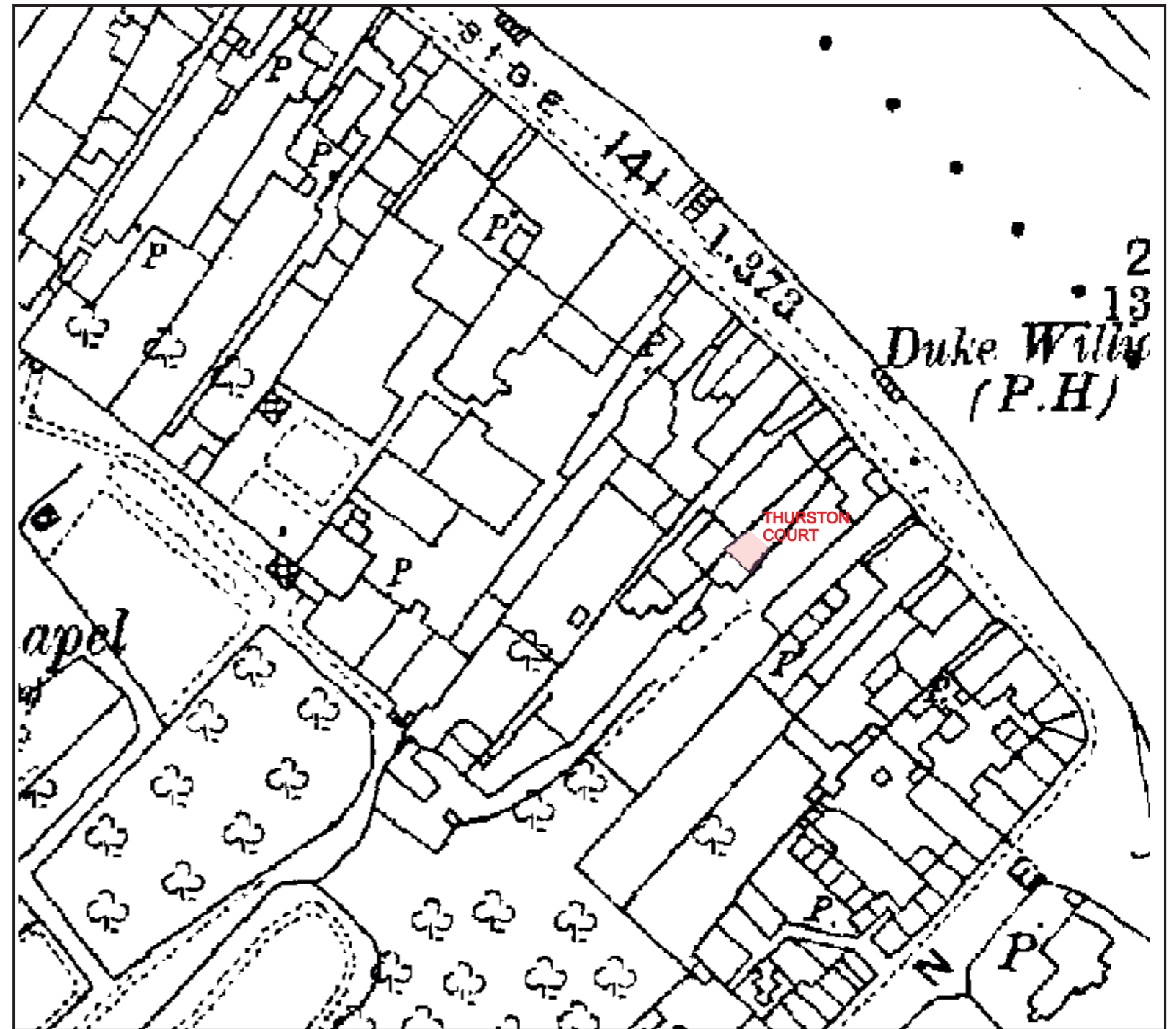
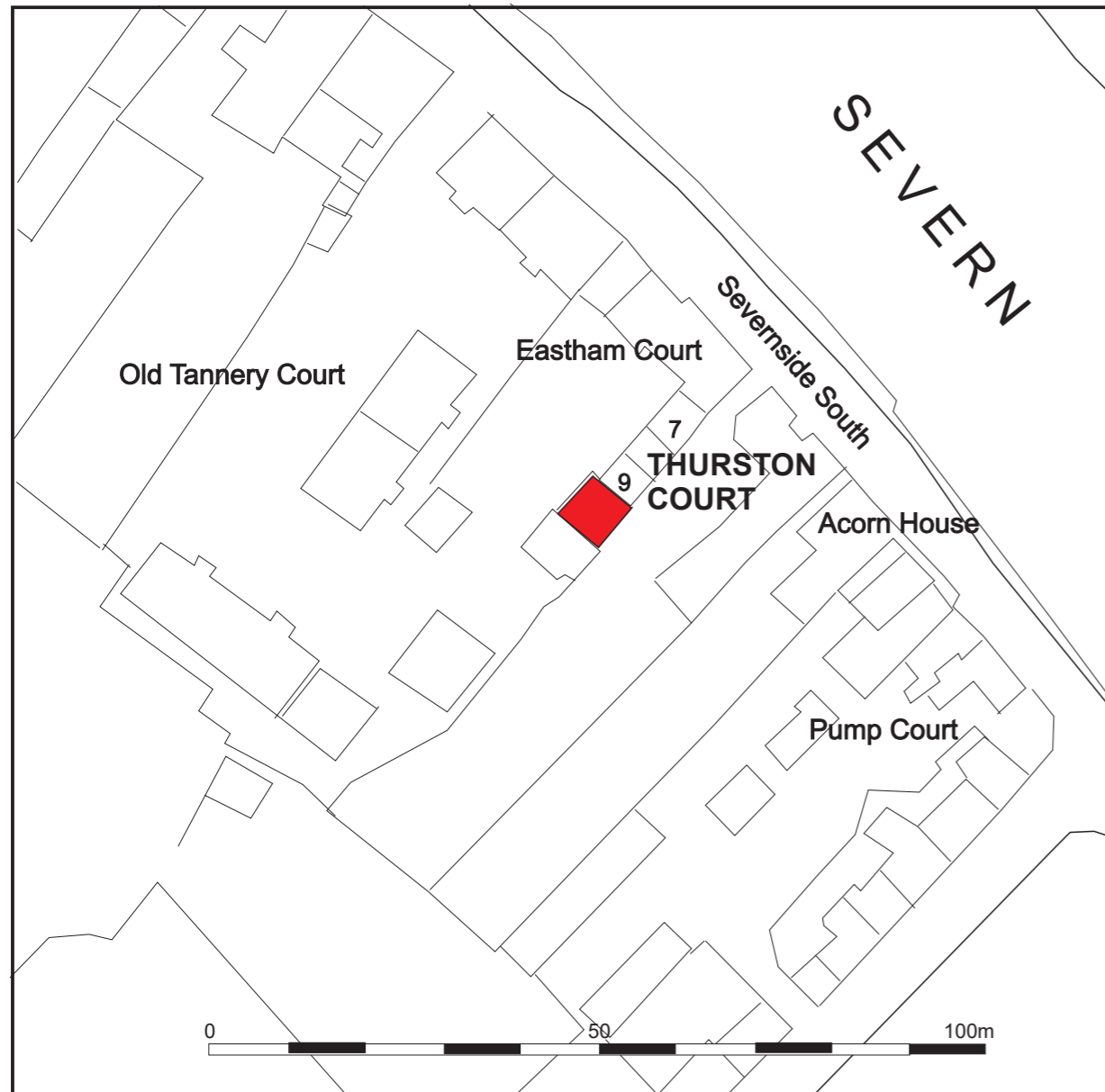






Figure 2: Tithe Awards plan

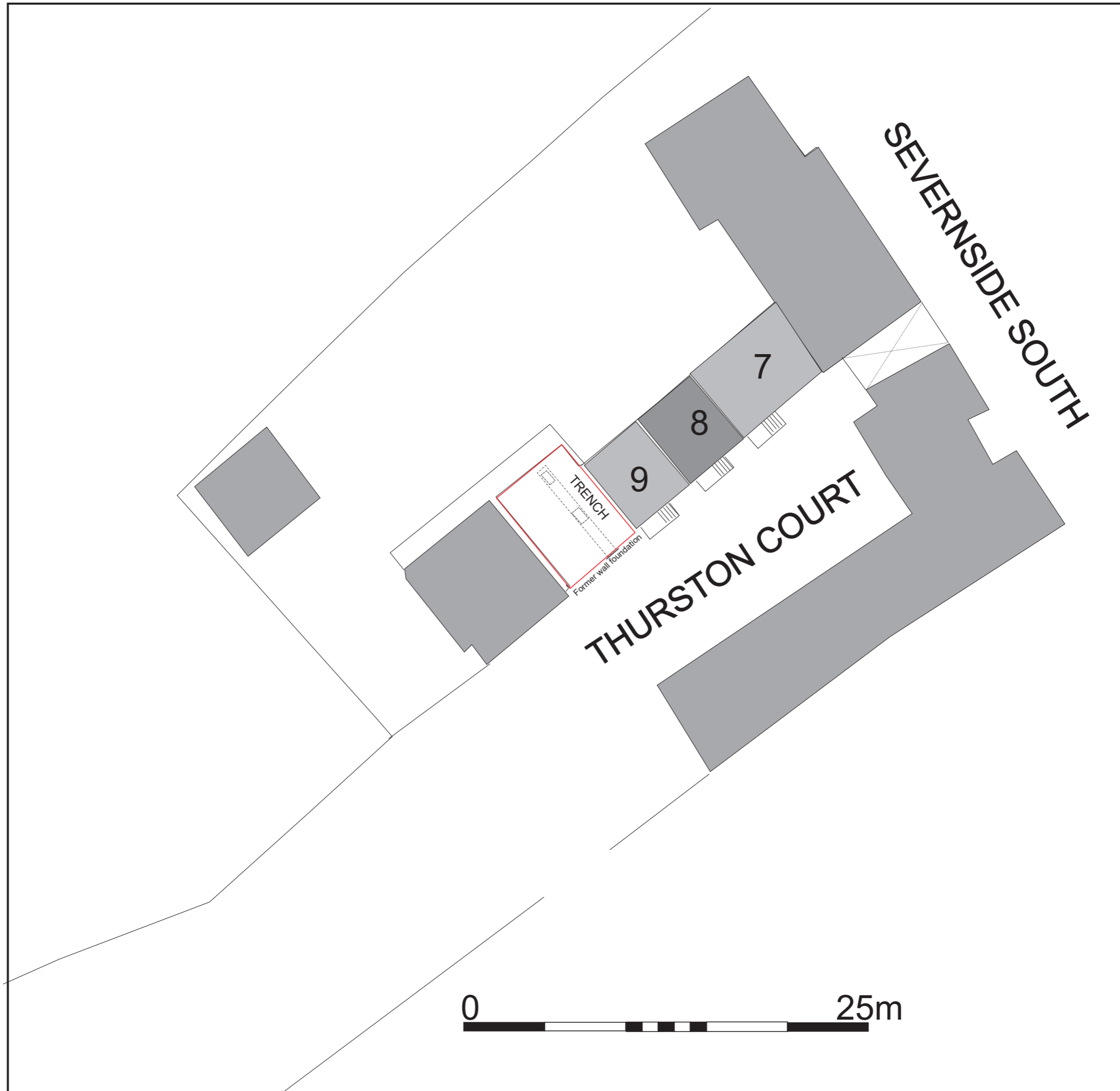


Figure 3: Trench location - development area shown as red outline



Trench location - facing south-east



Deposits below 19th Century brick floor



Excavated trial pit into underlying natural deposits

Figure 4: Evaluation trench



Figure 5: 0.35m of made ground/make up beneath 19th C. brick floor - floor overlaid by demolition rubble of early 20th C date - northern end of trench

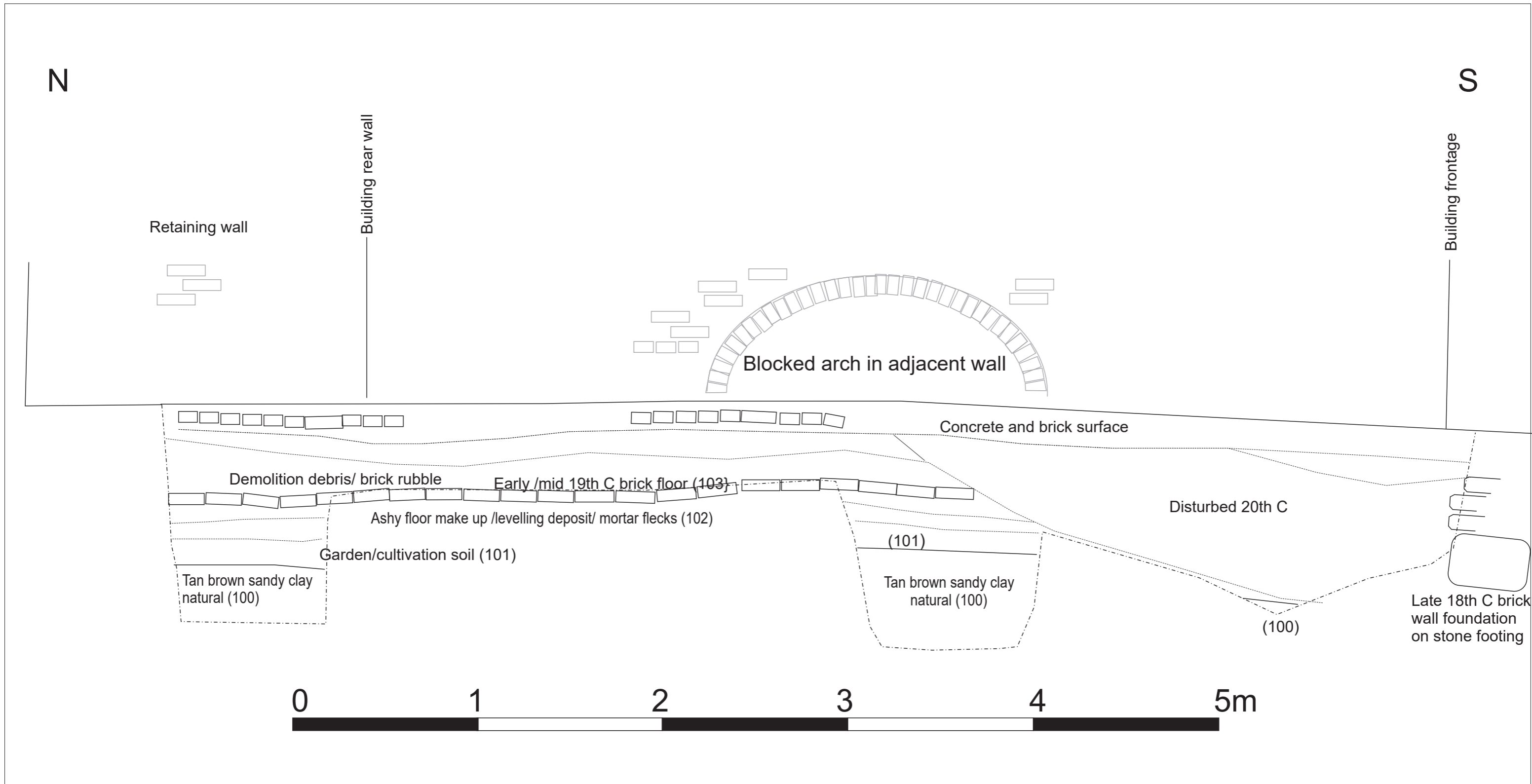


Figure 6: Trench section