

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND BUILDING RECORDING AT DOG LANE BEWDLEY (FORMER FIRE STATION AND MEDICAL CENTRE SITE)



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Archaeological evaluation and building recording at Dog Lane Bewdley (former fire station and medical centre site)

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation and building recording was undertaken prior to proposed re-development of the former Fire Station/Medical Centre site at Dog Lane, Bewdley. Two trenches were excavated, one on the fire station carpark and the other on the site of the former medical centre. The westernmost trench produced some evidence of former horticultural soils, whilst the eastern trench area was primarily occupied by foundations and service runs relating to the former Medical Centre. In neither trench was there any indication of the presence of archaeologically significant deposits or structures.

A basic building record was made of the 1966 Fire Station building; the structure proved to be relatively unchanged other than replacement of the original garage doors with electronically operated roller shutter doors. The construction was unexceptional for its period.

1 **Introduction**

1.1 A heritage impact assessment (WSM73471) was undertaken in 2020 prior to proposed re-development of the former Fire Station/Medical Centre site at Dog Lane, Bewdley (NGR SO 78554 75472). The present report builds on the basis of the MNA impact assessment with reports on the archaeological evaluation of the site (by 110 Archaeology) and a Level I record of the former fire station building (by MNA).

2 **Methodology**

2.1 The present report repeats the relevant portions of background information from the 2020 desk top assessment and heritage statement for the site. Fieldwork for the archaeological evaluation was undertaken by 110 Archaeology during 1st-3rd June 2020. The planned two trenches were in the event split into three due to the presence of a live service run. These trenches (1 & 2) each measuring approx. 7.50m long and 1.60m wide were excavated on the southern, more elevated area of the site (Fig 1). The third trench 15m long and 1.60m wide was excavated on the lower eastern side of the site. Trenches were excavated using a mini-digger with toothless ditching bucket. Sections and the trench base were then hand cleaned prior to recording in plan and section (Figs 2 to 5). The trench locations were surveyed in relation to the site boundaries and existing building on the site.

2.2 The natural substrate, comprising a light brown clay (104, 203 & 303) was exposed at varying degrees within all three trenches. The surface of this clay was recorded throughout both trenches 1 and 2 at a level height of 21.66m and 21.39m (AOD) respectively.

2.3 The fire station building was recorded photographically internally and externally prior to proposed demolition – the building had very few features of specialist interest (Figs 6-11).

3 Historic Background

3.1 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 14th to 18th centuries. By the 16th 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 The present street layout was likely settled in the 15th century when settlement became refocused nearer to the river as a result of quayside and bridge-head development to the west of the the new bridge crossing. This replaced the earlier linear settlement and marketplace situated along Wyre hill. The Lode Street (now officially spelled as Load Street) area was developed during this period with tenement plots (WSM19351) laid out along the road from the later 15th century onwards. The name Lode derives from the middle English for a watercourse. Medieval activities in the area to the north of the street possibly included industrial sites such as warehousing and tanneries as well as domestic buildings.

3.4 Dog Lane runs in a slight curve roughly north to south on the north-west edge of the historic core of Bewdley. There is some suggestion its shape follows the line of a medieval ditch delineating the northern extent of the early settlement but as yet there is little evidence to prove this (Buteux 1996). Properties were recorded in Dog Lane in 1472 and during the 15th century Dog Lane may have formed the western boundary of a block of tenements which were laid out as a single unit. The area north of the lane was known as Dog Lane Meadow and does not appear to have been developed until the 18th Century.

3.5 One of the four town gates of Bewdley was located at the top of Dog Lane (WSM10695) and excavations in 1959 recovered timbers and artefacts (WSM 10854).

3.6 Dog Lane was made a turn-pike in 1773 (Worcester Journal 17th Mar 1808) and the turnpike trust for Dog Lane Gate was still active in the 1870s (WRO BA4600/261/iii and ref705:550 408/ii). There appears to have been a slipway at the eastern end of the lane. Various leases survive for properties in Dog Lane, which was also referred to as Dog Land Meadow. There is a lease of 1717: Counterpart lease for 31 years from the Bailiff and Burgesses of Bewdley Borough by direction of William Wood of Bewdley aforesaid, innholder to John Dovey of Bewdley aforesaid, glover of a messuage and dwelling house with garden and appurtenances in Dog Lane, a garden adjoining thereto and a meadow called Dogland Meadow in trust for the said William Wood.(WRO BA8782/62/13 ref 899:749), A further lease of 1748 possibly relates to the same houses on the north side of the lane - Draft memorandum of agreement between the Bailiff and Burgesses of Bewdley Borough and Joseph Oldham on behalf of William Carter to lease for 21 years Dog Lane Meadow [in Bewdley] with two tenements outbuildings and gardens (WRO BA8782/58/ii/35 ref 899:749)

3.7A plan of Dowles dating to 1784 survives as a copy in the Prattinton Collection of the Society of Antiquarys (I am grateful to Stephen Price for this information and the photograph reproduced on Fig 2) – whilst this only shows the Dog Lane area in sketch form it does seem to indicate the presence of buildings on the southern side of Dog Lane

3.8 A block of seven cottages and a coal store in Dog Lane (abutting the river) were sold by the Crown at auction in July 1870, the purchaser for £370 was a Mr S Jeffries (Worcester Chronicle 6th July 1870) – these properties presumably stood on the northern side of the street. Six similarly located cottages “by Coals Quay” Dog Lane were again auctioned in 1879 (Worcester Herald 7th June 1879).

3.10` There are very few illustrative or cartographic sources for the site, which was screened from the principal views from Bewdley Bridge by the houses along the quayside. One early 19th Century illustration, however, does appear to throw some light onto the historical activity in the lower Dog Lane area. This illustration (printed in 1823 by Samuel Danks after a painting by James Ward dated 1813) appears to show a large bottle kiln near Dog Lane. A kiln of this form and size in the context of Bewdley would probably have been a downdraft brick kiln. References to brick and tile making in the town are exceedingly sparse, however a brick kiln was identified at the rear of numbers 1-5 Dog Lane buried beneath late 18th to early 20th century pottery and glass bottles (WSM 00008). This is possibly the same as that recorded on the 1823 illustration. A plan of 1784 shows the presence of a brick yard at Dowles, this brickyard was offered for rent by a Mrs Allen of Welch Gate Bewdley in 1826 (Worcester Journal 16th November 1826) An advertisement in 1829 for a sale of firebrick in Bewdley indicates that the kiln was within a mile and a half of the town, so this does not fit the location north of Dog Lane, a sale of brickmaking equipment belonging to S Skey at Dowles occurred in 1838 (14 June 1838)- Worcester Chronicle) but the brickworks and brickfields were still owned by the Skey family at the time of the 1840 Tithe Award. The Skeys owned land up to the edge of Dog Lane Meadow and much of this land was presumably dug for clay.

3.11 No other reference to an 1820s kiln locally has been located, however there was a documented tilemaker in the town in the 1860s – Samuel Boraston operated the “Bridewell Brick Yard” which supplied drainage pipes in 1869 (Shrops RO ref 1396/105-7). In 1861 (Census) Samuel Boraston was described as a coal dealer living at Severn Side Street, he was subsequently listed as a brick and tile maker of Wribbenhall in the 1879 Littlebury’s Directory. By 1881 aged 60 he was living at Wribbenhall Cottage Kidderminster Foriegn. A brick kiln was observed in 1976 by Jan Roberts to the rear of 1-5 Dog Lane (WSM00008) but the precise location and date of the kiln were not recorded. As Boraston apparently operated the coal wharf at the end of the lane it would seem possible that the 1976 observation related to his activities.

4 Previous archaeological work

4.1 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 16th and 17th activity, including hornworking, on or near the site. There was however evidence of road widening and heightening in the 19th 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.

4.2 Excavations to the south-west of the site at 27 Dog Lane (WSM 31923; Miller et al, 2003) found no evidence of medieval activity and only limited evidence for 16th and 17th activity, including hornworking, on or near the site. There was however evidence of road widening and heightening in the 19th century.

4.3 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 17th to 20th 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 18th century buildings were also recorded and a timber structure identified as a jetty located in the river bed was dated to the late 16th or early 17th century.

4.4 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 19th 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 18th century. Further excavations at the foot of Dog Lane revealed an east-west stone wall appearing to pre-date the present 18th century property boundaries and suggesting an earlier town layout. Overlying this was a sequence of post-medieval deposits which were cut by a 19th century pumping station chamber. A single fragment of Roman tile was recovered.

4.5 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.

4.6 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 17th century as a bakery and additions to the rear of the building were made in the late 17th to 18th 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.

4.7 Archaeological watching briefs at the site of the replacement 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.

5 Evaluation trenches

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was the westernmost trench, and had a fairly simple depositional sequence, with no significant cut features.

Contexts 100 and 101 consisted of tarmac carpark surface and a crushed concrete/roadstone sub-base. Most of the trench area covered a late 19th C or early 20th C. red brick surface or foundation layer of unmortared brick 3-4 courses deep. It is likely that this foundation/floor relates to the former “drill hall” marked on early- mid 20th C mapping. Context 103 was a mid-greyish-brown cultivation/garden soil, clayey silt frequent charcoal flecking and frequent crushed stone fragments. Context 104 was natural light brown clay.

5.2 *Trench 2*

A single modern rectangular pit measuring at least 1.50m long and 0.60m wide with vertical sides was partially observed truncating the natural clay in the northeast corner of trench 2. A similar sequence to Trench 1 was recorded in Trench 2, the natural brown clay (at 21.39mAOD) being overlain by a cultivation/garden soil (202). Contexts (200) and (201) were tarmac and sub-base.

5.3 *Trench 3*

Trench 3 lay in the area of the former Medical Centre buildings, and areas of concrete foundation, drainage and other surface runs occupied most of the excavated area. Where deposit sequences survived natural light brown clay (303) was overlain by 0.1-0.23m of a cultivated subsoil material (302) Light mid greyish brown silty-clay. A layer of probable 18th-19th Century cultivated garden soil up to 0.35m deep was recorded as context 301 “Dark greyish-brown clayey silt with frequent charcoal flecking - 19th C. garden soil”. The uppermost deposits consisted of “Dark brown soil, brick rubble, fragments of concrete – modern redeposited demolition debris” (Context 300).

6 **Discussion and interpretation**

6.1 As the documentary and cartographic sources suggested that the area of the proposed development lay on the fringes of the medieval and post-medieval settlement it was not expected that the evaluation trenches would encounter deep or complex archaeological remains. Historically the area had been garden and orchard at the rear of properties on the north side of Load Street. It remains unclear if there were historically any buildings on the southern side of this section of Dog Lane; the present investigation produced no evidence of medieval or early post-medieval buildings.

6.2 Trenches 1 and 2 appear to represent a fairly full sequence of deposits and are apparently representative of the historic development of the site. As anticipated Trench 3 found extensive evidence of the mid 20th Century medical centre and disturbance related to its demolition. Only small isolated patches of this lower part of the site had reasonably well preserved deposit sequences. The comparative levels of natural on the upper and lower parts of the site indicate that that truncation of the lower area is not likely to have been generally more than 0.5-0.7m prior to construction of the medical centre, and the west-east fall of Dog Lane is representative of the natural ground slope. The upper part of the site (fire station carpark) has been built up by around 0.5-0.7m on average, probably in order to consolidate the surface to take the weight of laden fire appliances. The use of crushed concrete and stone suggest this occurred around the period of fire station construction in the 1960s.

6.3 Given the distance from the late medieval and early post medieval frontages of Load Street the absence of accidentally discarded historic artefacts or deliberate rubbish disposal features is unsurprising. There was also no evidence that the area had been previously used for clay extraction despite the historical proximity of a brick kiln.

6.4 No archaeologically significant artefacts were observed or recovered during the evaluation trenching, and therefore it is unlikely that archaeologically significant deposits survive in any quantity in the immediate vicinity of the development.

7 Acknowledgments

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Figure 1: Site location and trench plan Dog Lane Bewdley

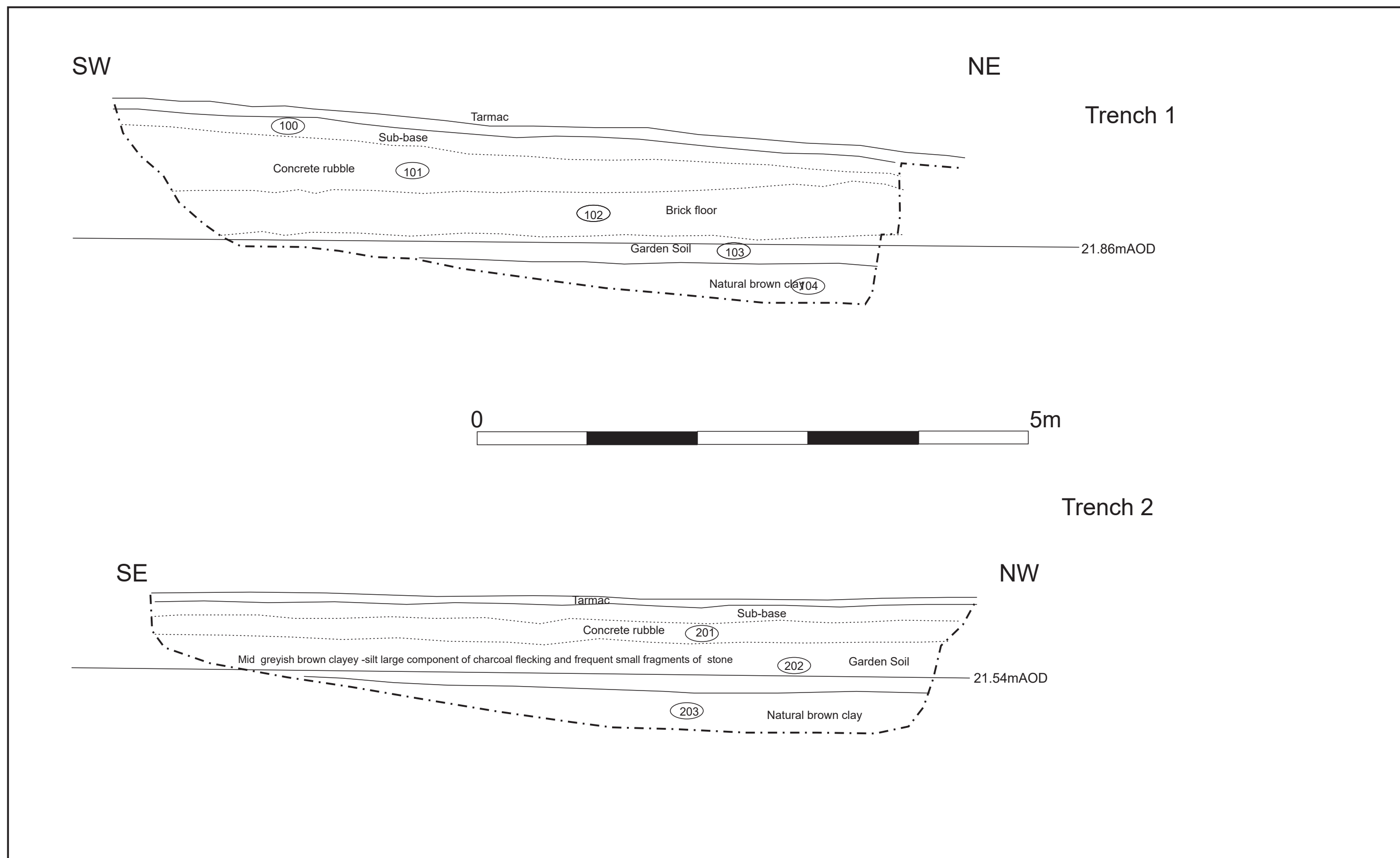


Figure 2: Trench sections

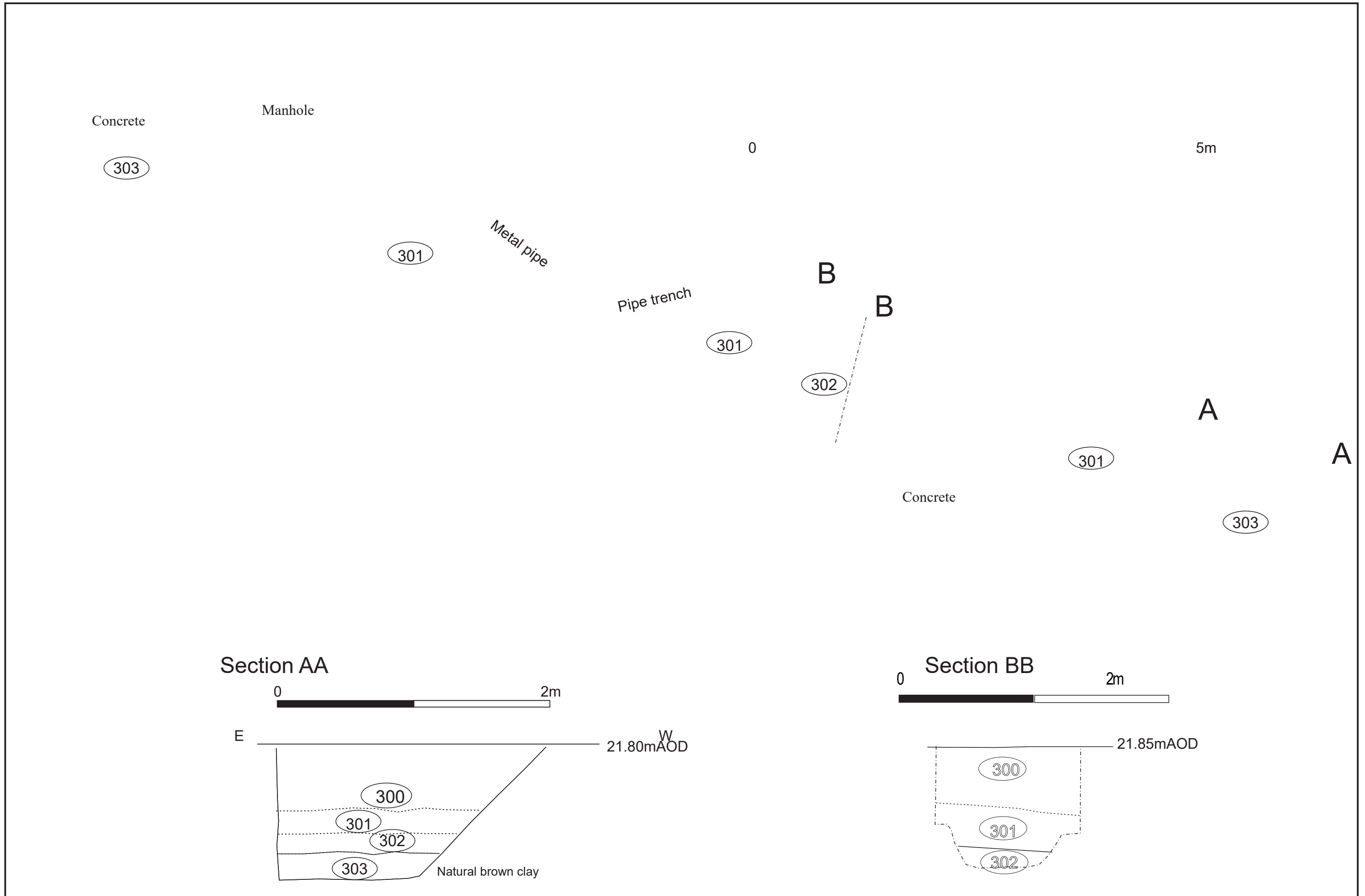


Figure 3: Trench 3 plan and representative sections



Trench 2 view facing north - prior to and after excavation of brick floor



Trench 2
brick floor/footing detail



Trench 1 view facing north with detail of deposition sequence (scale 1m)

Figure 4: Trenches 2 and 3



View from north



View from west



View from east



View from north-west



View from south

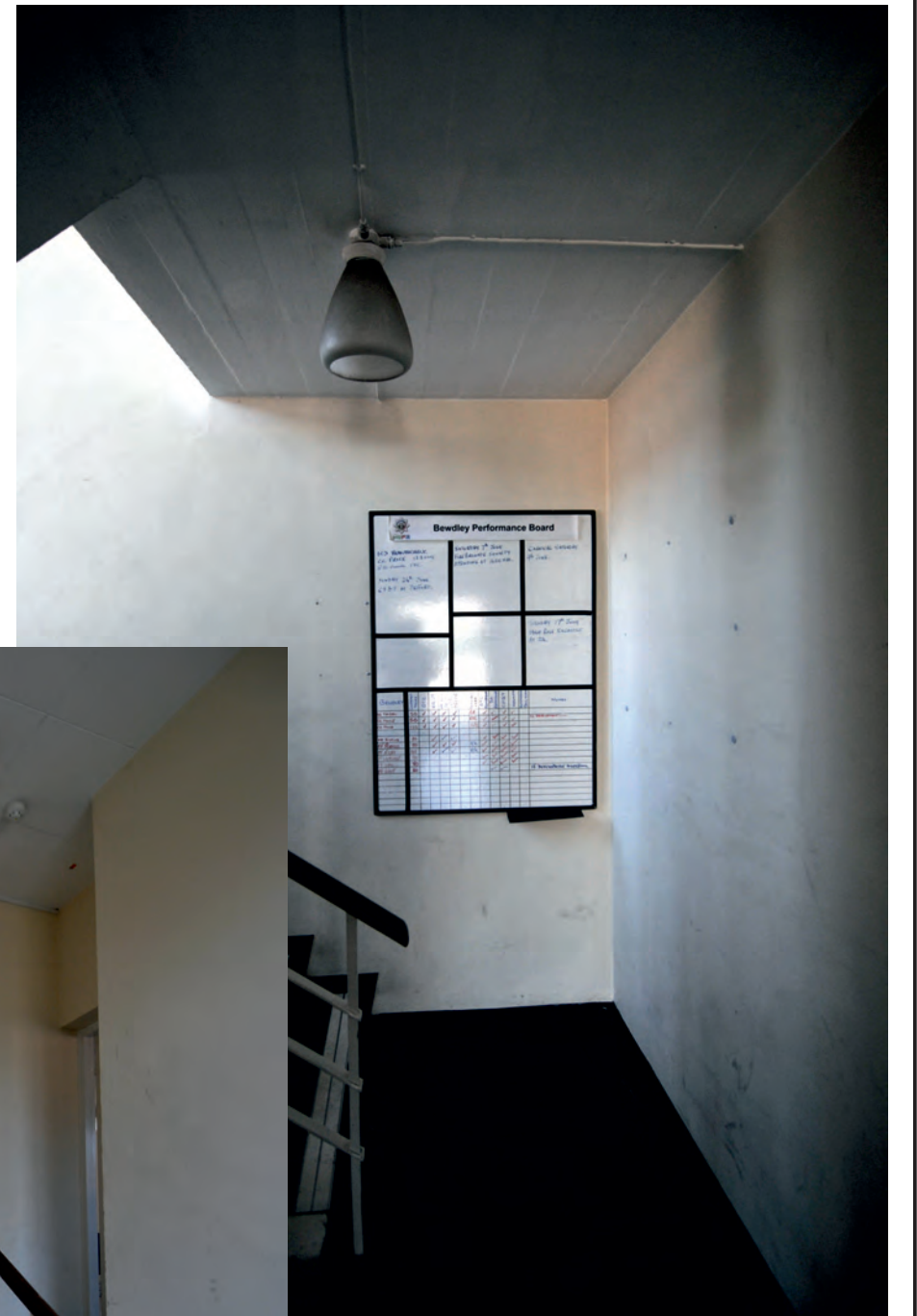
Figure 6: Details of exterior



Figure 7: General views of firestation site



Kitchen



Briefing room



Stairwell

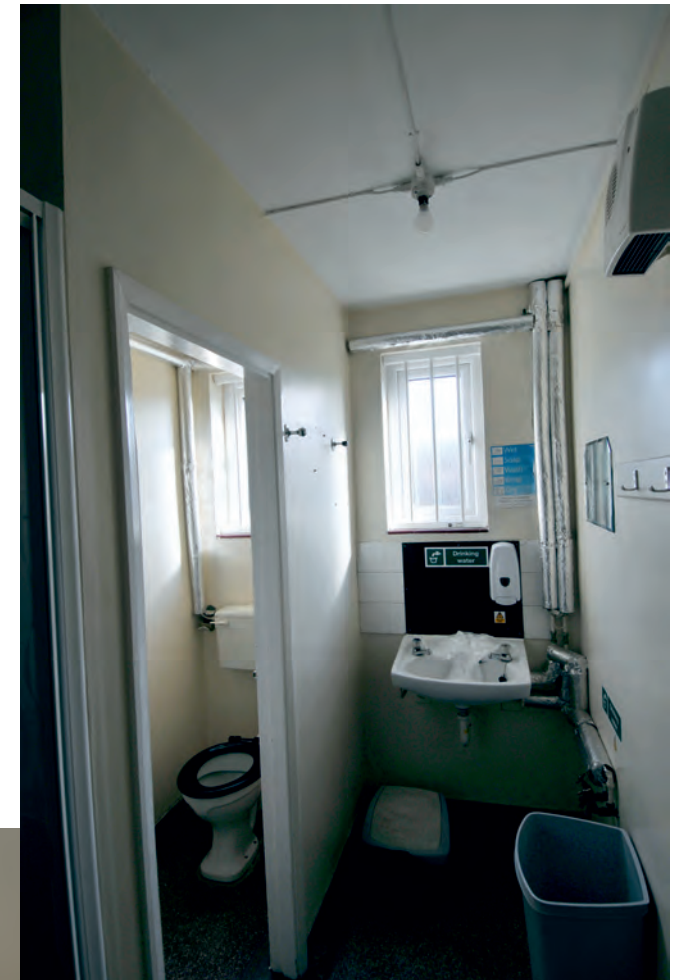
Figure 8 Fire Station interior



Corridor



Shower



Former pole drop shaft



Figure 9: Smaller rooms



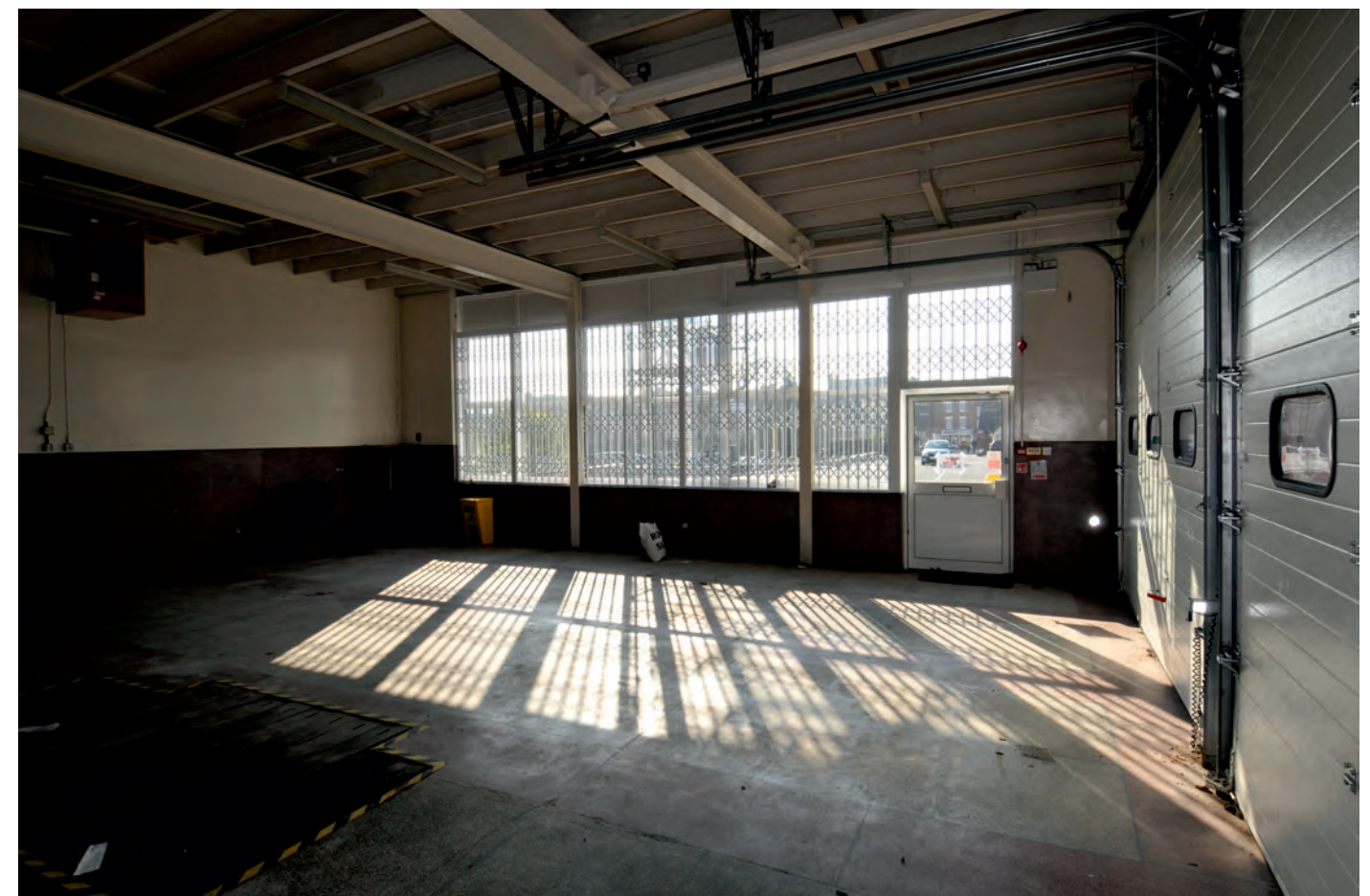
Equipment room off garage



View facing north-east



View facing west



View facing south



Figure 11: Ground floor office accommodation