

PAULS MOSS, WHITCHURCH, SHROPSHIRE

Archaeological Evaluation
Prepared for: Strata Housing Ltd

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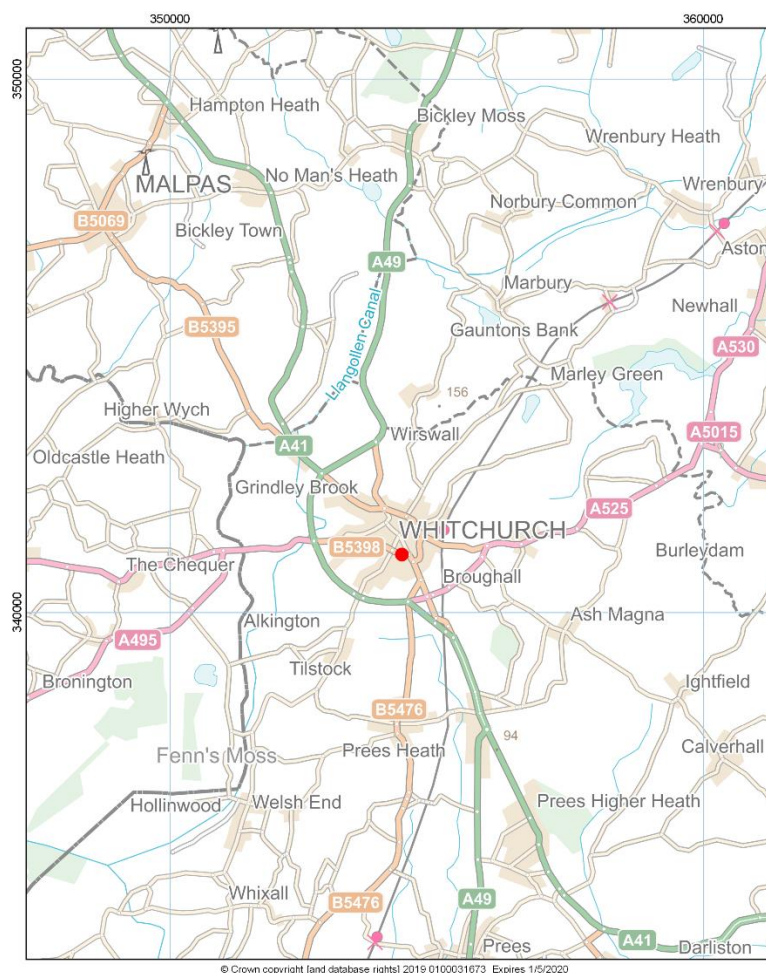
Appendix 01: Context Record

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Planning Background

SLR Consulting were commissioned by Strata Housing Ltd (part of Wrekin Housing Trust) (the Client) to undertake a programme of site investigation in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation¹ to mitigate the potential impacts of a new development. This work was required as Condition 3 placed on planning permission granted by Shropshire Council for proposed development to include 71 assisted living units and health centre, café and community rooms, plus car parking (18/05901/FUL) on land west of Dodington, Whitchurch, Shropshire SY13 1HH.

Figure 1
Site Location with site shown as a red dot



1.2 Location, topography and geology

The Site (red dot, Figure 1) is located in the south of Whitchurch, which lies in northern Shropshire approximately 20 miles north of Shrewsbury and 2 miles east of the Welsh border. The topography of the area is characterised by gentle hills, the product of a glacial moraine, with deep deposits of sand within the town. The superficial

¹ Henshaw & Associates October 2019: *WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION: Evaluation Pauls Moss, Whitchurch, Shropshire*

natural geology is sand and gravel deposited by glacial meltwater immediately following the last Ice Age, while bedrock is Halite stone.

There is no river running through Whitchurch, but several small streams and springs occur, as well as small areas which contained historic mosses, such as Deer Moss or White Lion Meadow (now Tesco's car park) and Pauls Moss.

The highest point of the site investigation was c.102m AOD located at the northern end of Trenches 1 and 3 near the extant house, while the lowest point was c.98m AOD at the southwestern corner of Trench 4.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out in 2019 by Henshaw & Associates. The proposed development site is south of the historic core of Whitchurch and lies within the associated Conservation Area. Whitchurch is on the site of a Roman settlement named *Mediolanum*, and the site itself is immediately west of the Roman road Watling Street West, which ran between Chester and London and through the town. Roman burial urns were found just off the road approximately 200m southeast of the site in 1899.

The development site formed part of the historic zone of Dodington, a name which lives on in the street name but was absorbed into Whitchurch by the post-medieval period. As such, it was possible that multiple phases of occupation would be present on site.

Pauls Moss House is a substantial villa dating from 1894-1895, built by the architects Willink and Thicknesse for E P Thompson who lived in the house until his death in 1924. Thompson (1856-1924) was the second generation in a family of successful Liverpool bankers. He was a great philanthropist and benefactor for the town, who also built a row of cottages on Bark Hill for some of his staff, and individual houses for others such as those at the entrance to the estate off Dodington. A covered water fountain was constructed at the junction of Sedgefield Road and Dodington after Roman cremation urns were found during excavation of foundations for one of these staff houses. After the death of Thompson's widow in the 1950s the building was bought by the local authority for use as offices, and was later converted to flats.

Historic Ordnance Survey maps from the turn of the century show an extensive range of buildings and gardens, with the house at the centre of the complex. Paths and a boat house show the estate extended into Pauls Moss itself. It is clear that a large amount of landscaping to create the new gardens must have been undertaken as part of the general Victorian development of the area.

2.0 Archaeological Evaluation

2.1 Aims and Objectives

2.1.1 Aims

- to investigate and record the extent of archaeological remains within the development envelope
- to assess the evidence and if necessary, design a mitigation strategy proportional to the heritage significance of the remains.

2.1.2 Objectives

A trial trench approach was adopted, with the following objectives:

- to investigate sub-surface deposits;
- to establish the general deposit sequence on the site;
- to establish the extent, nature and date of any man-made archaeological features or remains which may be present on the site;
- to undertake post-excavation analysis of the records, artefacts and samples recovered during the work to produce a report for submission to the local planning authority; and
- to deposit an archive of site records, reports and artefacts with an appropriate body

3.0 Detailed Methodology

3.1 Trial Trenching and archaeological investigation

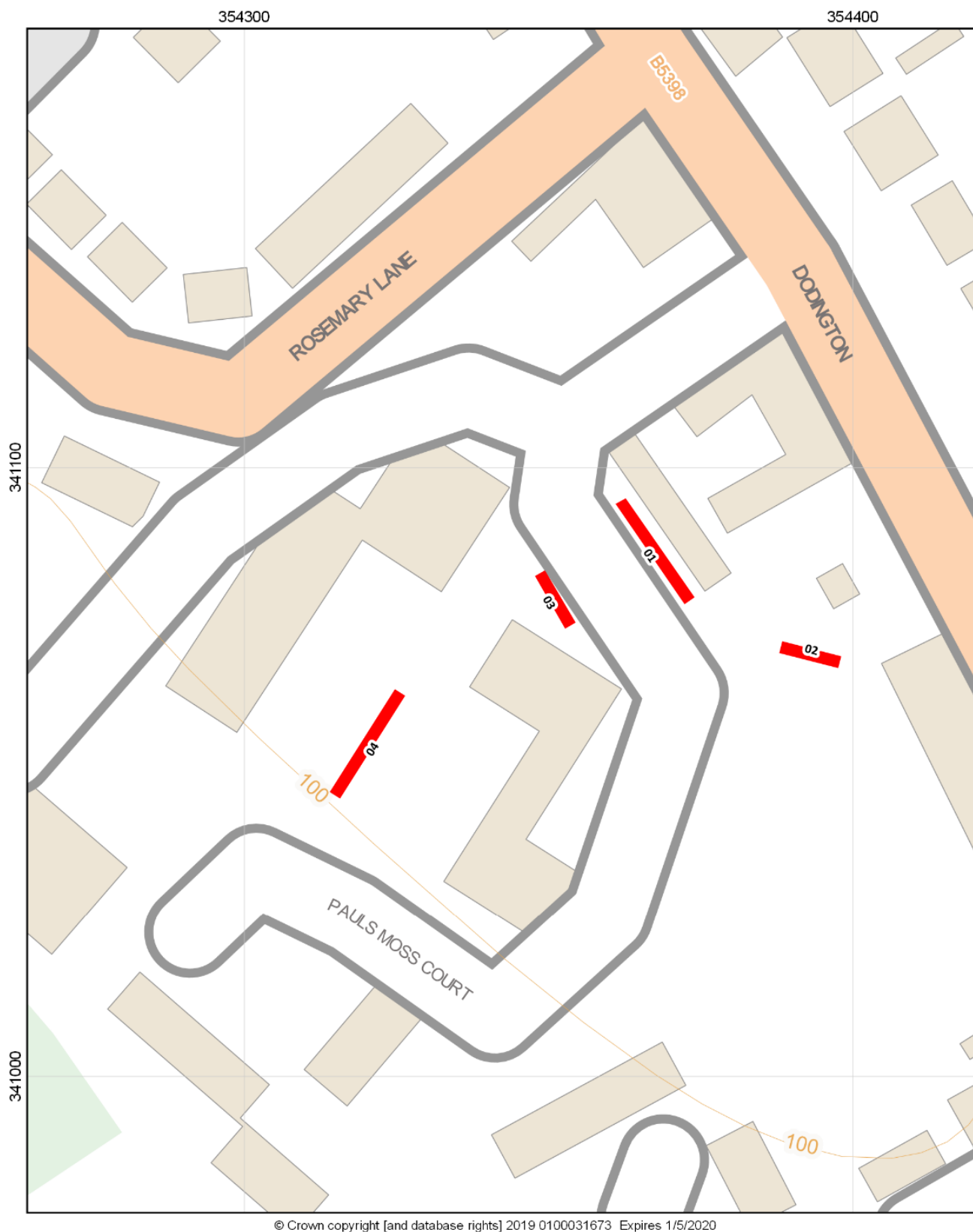
Four trenches were excavated using a mechanical excavator with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket to carefully remove the overburden to the top of archaeological remains or undisturbed natural deposits (Figure 2). Trench 2, located in a tarmac parking area (Figure 6), was initially excavated with a toothed bucket in order to break the tarmac before excavation continued with a toothless bucket. This work was carried out under continuous archaeological supervision.

The trenches varied in length with 1 and 4 being c.20m, and 3 and 4 c.10m (Figure 2).

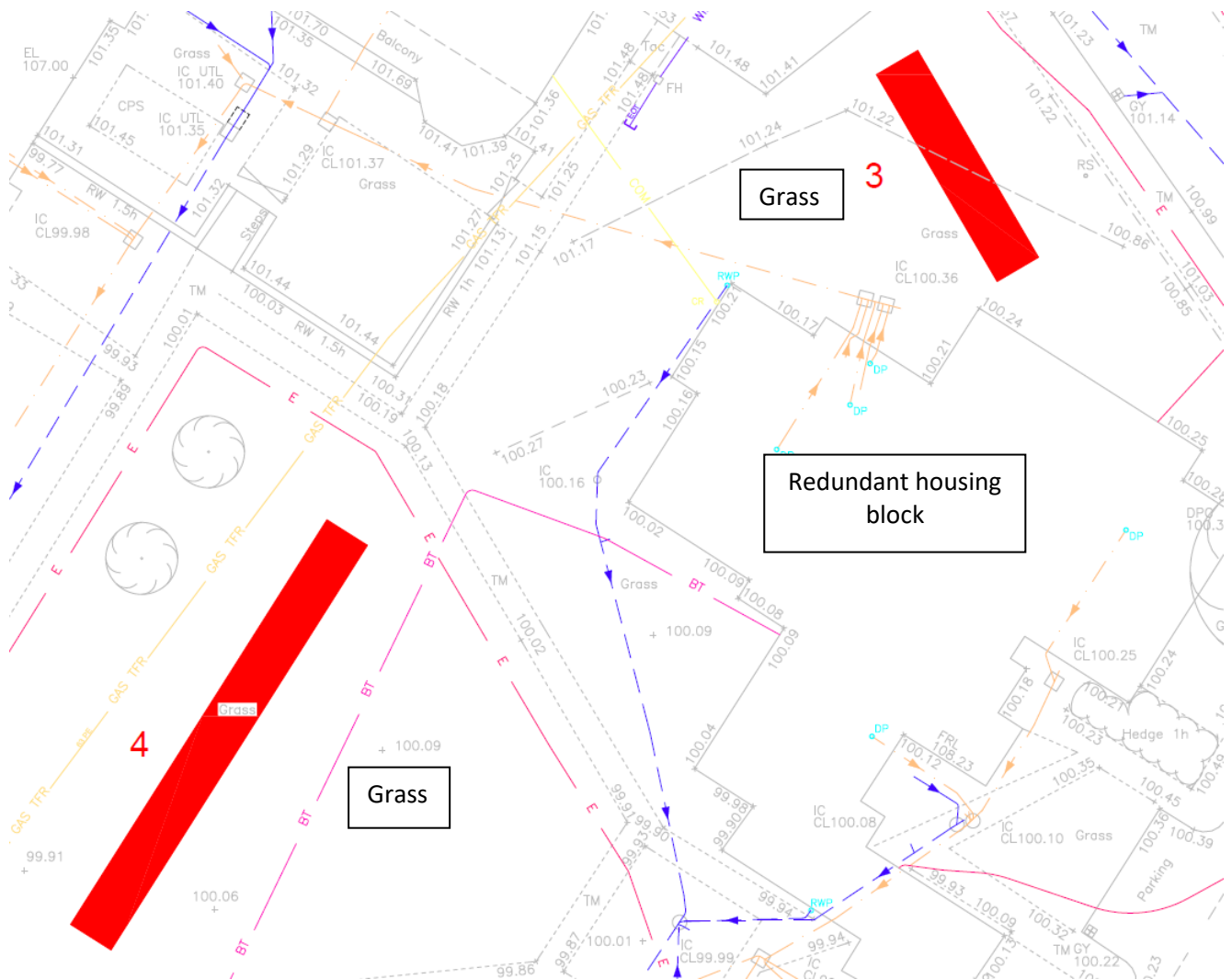
The site code was PMW20 (Pauls Moss Whitchurch, 2020).

Trenches were laid out with utility avoidance as a priority due to the large number of buried services on site, however a gas pipe was present at the edge of Trench 4. Trenches were scanned with a Cable Avoidance Tool (CAT) prior to excavation.

Figure 2
Trench Locations with existing services shown as constraints



Mapped utility constraints: light yellow = gas main; dark yellow and blue = foul drainage; red BT = telecoms; red E = electricity



3.1.1 Fieldwork recording

After removal of the topsoil and subsoil with a mechanical excavator, the trench surface was inspected and manually cleaned to identify potential archaeological remains cut into the natural geology. Cut features were recorded in plan and a section cut across each one. Deposits were recorded using a digital recording system, and fully cross-referenced.

The photographic record comprised high-resolution digital images with a supporting index. The drawn record comprised plans of the trenches at a 1:50 scale, with 1:20 for representative trench sections of the deposit sequence.

On completion of the evaluation Shropshire Council's Archaeological Advisor confirmed that this fieldwork stage has been satisfactorily accomplished. An OASIS record will be deposited in due course.

4.0 Results

4.1 General site description

Trial trenching was undertaken on the 19th and 20th of February 2020 in variable conditions including heavy rain for a period. The site is mixed grassed area and tarmac, with buildings ranging in date from the 19th Century to the 1970s. Detailed descriptions of archaeological contexts can be found in Appendix 1.

Figure 3
Trench 1 location looking NW (note white-washed wall)



4.2 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 19m long with a ramp out of its southern end, and was oriented north-west – south-east. It was positioned at the edge of a grassed area lying between a building wall and a car park (Figure 3). Due to the constraints surrounding the trench it was not possible to step the sides. Machine excavation was therefore conducted to a depth of 1.2m through dark-brown sandy silt made ground, where in the north-western half of the trench geological natural was not identified. Instead, brick rubble and surviving wall courses were present to around 1.1m BGL and below was a clay sand containing post-medieval brick and other material. In the south-eastern part, natural was identified apart from a square-cut linear feature [1005] of a depth greater than 1.9m BGL which had been cut from immediately below topsoil and terminated c.3m into the trench (Figures 4 & 5).

The northern part of the trench lies within the original footprint of the adjacent building which is shown on historic mapping around 1900 as extending to the limit of the current car park (Figure 6). It is still present on 1937-61 mapping, so the building was likely reduced to its current extent with the construction of the current Pauls Moss buildings and car parking area. Cement and whitewash are still present on the surviving wall face.

Figure 4
Trench 1 looking NW



Figure 5
Trench 1 Representative Section E facing

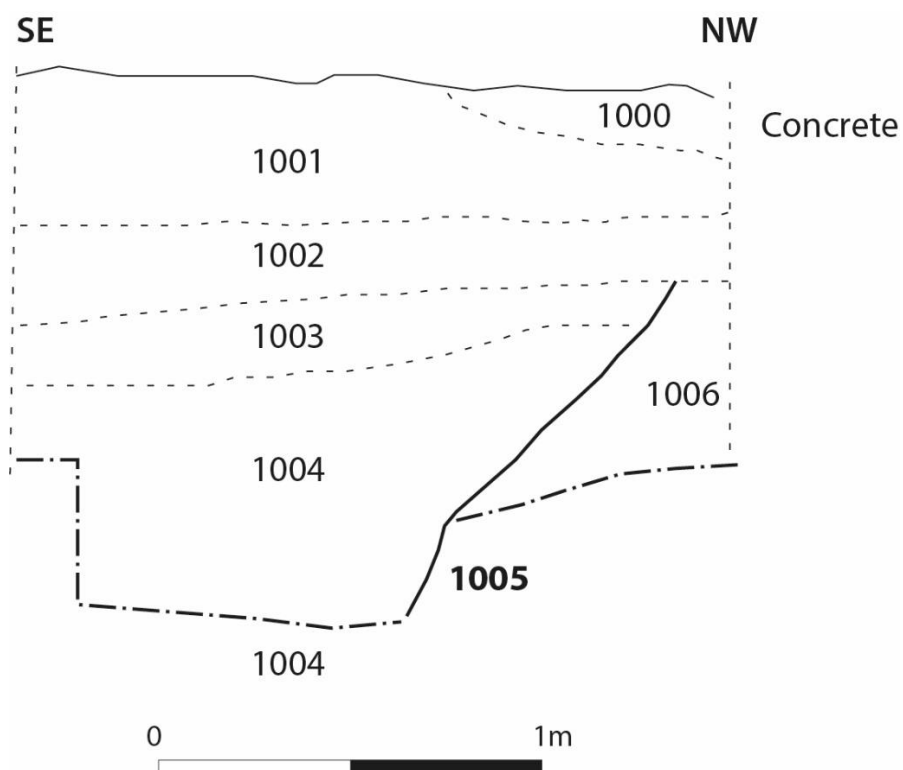
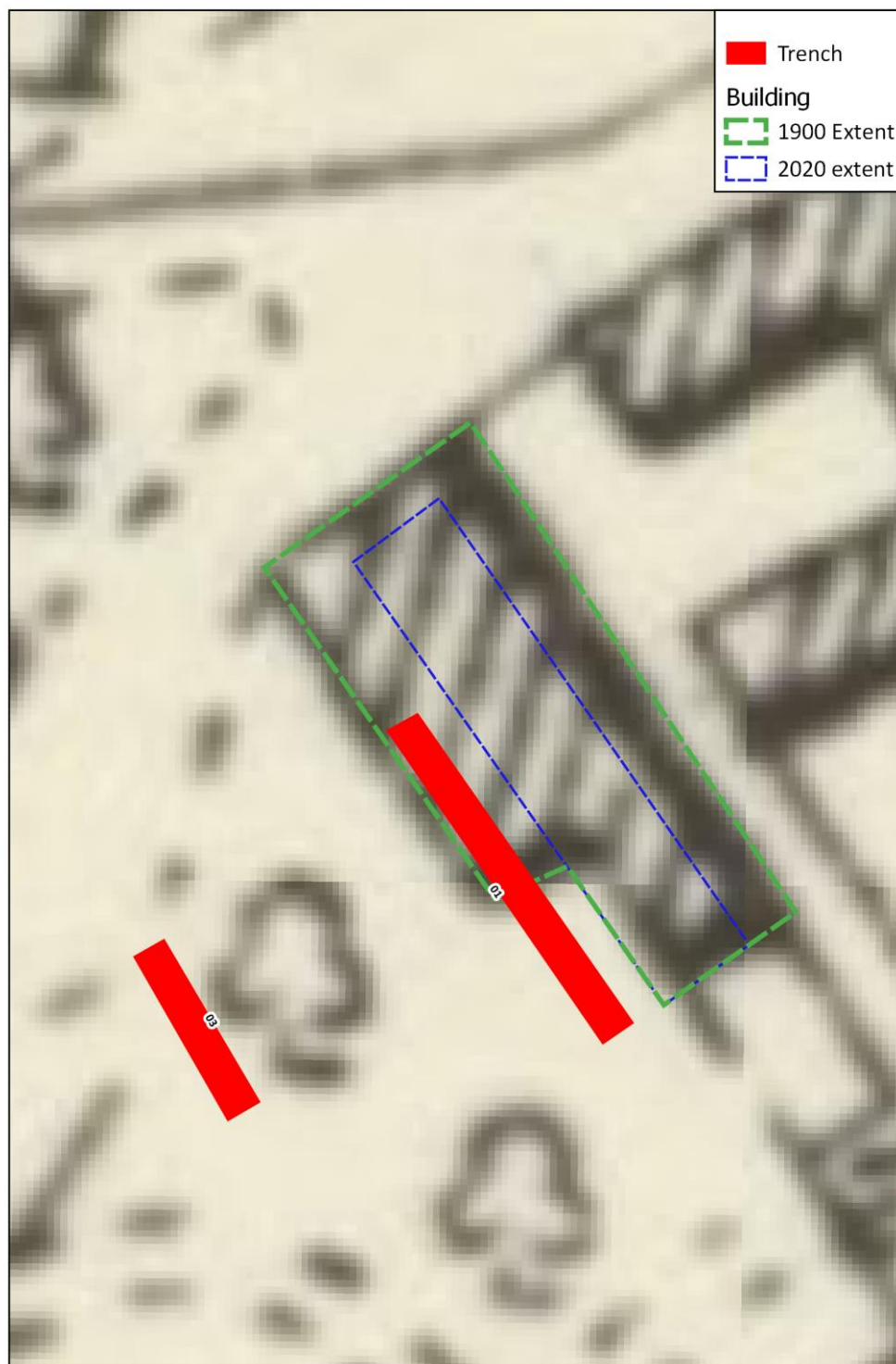


Figure 6
Trench 1 in relation to original building



Base map from National Library of Scotland <http://www.nls.uk/>

Figure 7
Trench 2 looking WSW with redundant housing block in background



4.3 Trench 2

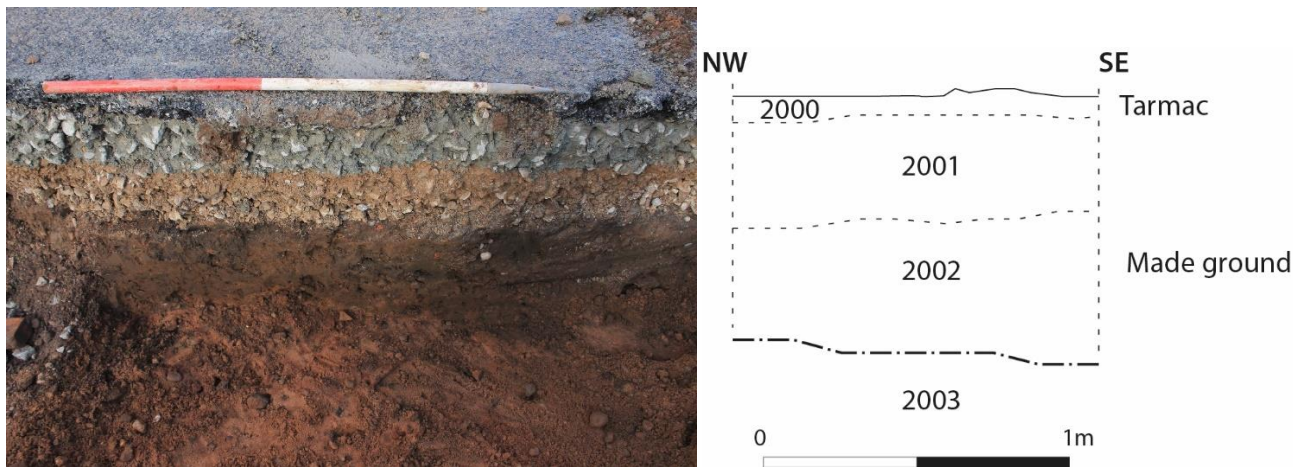
Trench 2 was situated outside of the main development site in a tarmaced area adjacent to a residential property. It was on the highest ground in the area and was the closest trench to the Roman road which lies c.20m to the east. The trench was 9m long with a ramped end and oriented WNW-ESE (Figures 7 - 9).

No archaeological features were identified, though half of a square pit loosely filled with modern rubble was present mid-way along the trench. The deposit sequence below tarmac was 300m of roadstone overlying another 300mm of dark, compacted made ground. Natural was identified at c.800mm BGL. A potential linear feature/gully was investigated at the northern end of the trench, but this had no artefactual inclusions and was retrospectively interpreted as a slightly deeper zone of the general deposit of made ground.

Figure 8
Trench 2 looking WNW



Figure 9
Trench 2 Representative Section SSW Facing



4.4 Trench 3

Trench 3, located in a grassed area and on a significant slope leading towards the present building, was 9m long with a ramped end to the north and oriented northwest-southeast. The depth was a maximum of 1.2m and a minimum of 0.8, with a higher natural level to the northwest. In the south-eastern part of the trench, below topsoil and subsoil a light clay-sand overlay the natural though this was of varying depth and no dating evidence could be identified. It was a sterile layer with no inclusions. A French drain with a plastic-lagged cable cut across the bottom corner of the trench (see figure 8) preventing machining to full depth in that section. A clay-pipe stem was recovered from the subsoil in section.

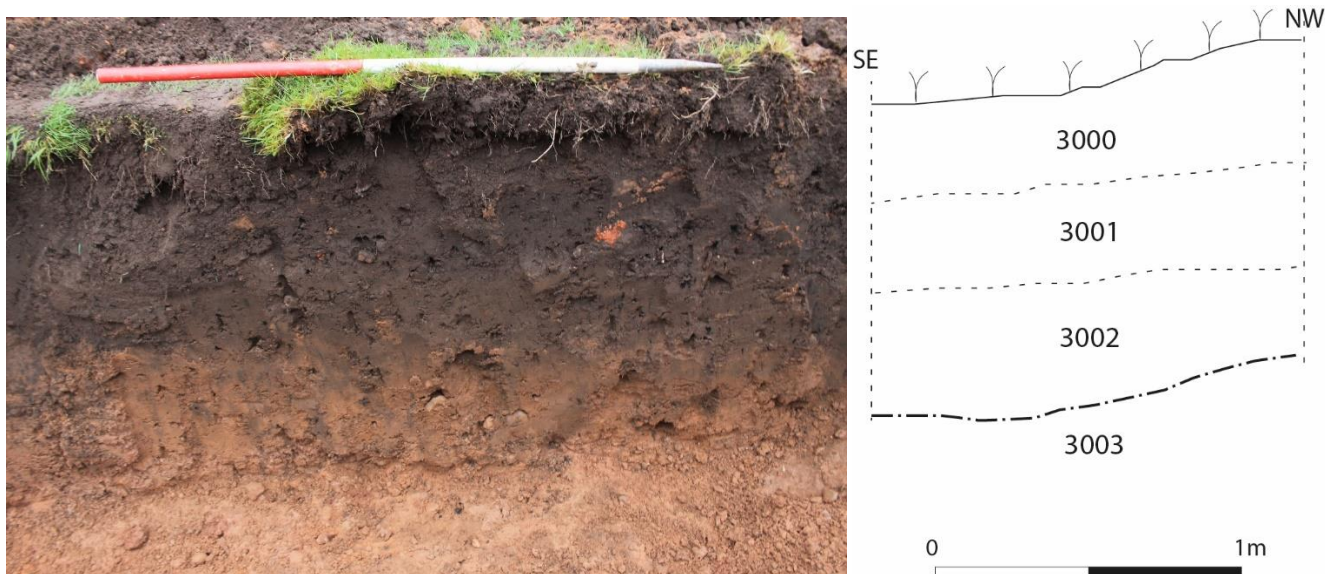
Figure 10
Trench 3 looking SE towards redundant housing block



Figure 11
Trench 3 looking NW



Figure 12
Trench 3 Representative Section NE facing



4.5 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 17m long with a 3m ramp at its eastern end, and oriented northeast-southwest (Figure 13). The deposit sequence revealed a depth of between 1.2 and 1.45m to natural undisturbed geology, with the deepest zone at the southwest (Figures 14 and 16). Below topsoil, a layer of hard core and early modern made ground overlaid a buried soil containing post-medieval pottery, animal bone, clay-pipe stems, as well as bottle and window glass. The north-eastern end of the trench was curved slightly (Figure 15) to avoid striking a gas main which was not identified by the cable avoidance tool as it was plastic.

Figure 13
Trench 4 looking E



Figure 14
Trench 4 looking NE towards Pauls Moss House and redundant housing block

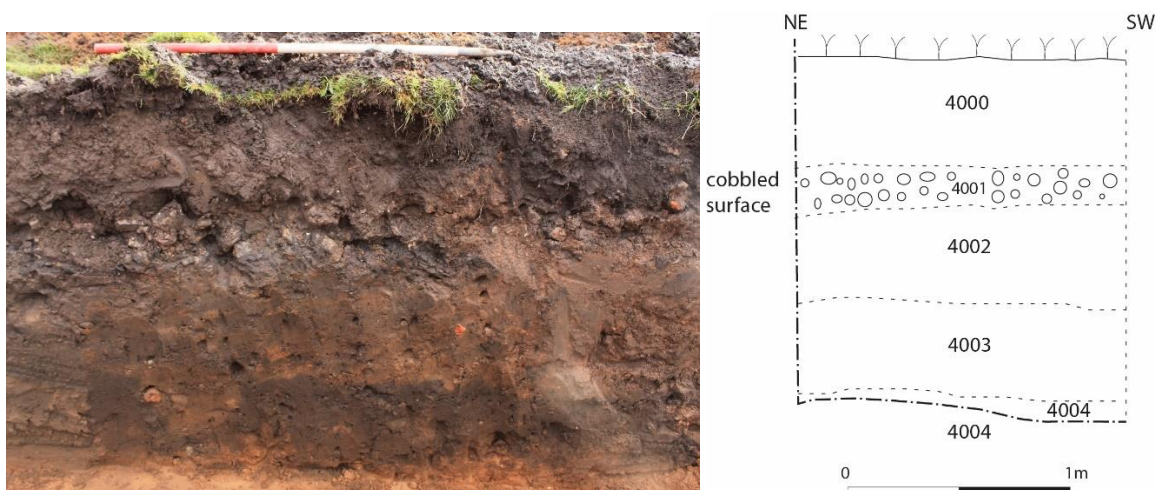


It has been assumed that the stony layer was part of the compound area laid out when the existing 1970s buildings were constructed. The depth of made ground beneath this layer suggests a major landscaping phase when the Victorian house and gardens were constructed, perhaps part of a design to terrace this part of the garden and raise it up from the natural fall towards Pauls Moss to the west.

Figure 15
Trench 4 looking SW (curve in trench to avoid gas main)



Figure 16
Trench 4 Representative Section facing NE



5.0 Discussion and Conclusions

The trial trenching at Pauls Moss revealed deep deposits for Trenches 1, 3 and 4, but a relatively shallow sequence for Trench 2. The latter was outside of the garden area for the main house, but the other three trenches show a post-medieval horticultural soil with bricks, tiles, clay-pipe stems, bottle glass, some animal bone and ceramics (Figure 17) with a depth that varied between 0.8 – 1.45m below current ground level. The post-medieval pottery and clay-pipe fragments probably reflect the horticultural use of the land prior to construction of the Victorian house and gardens, and some of the bricks appear unfrosted and relatively large, so of an earlier date than the house construction. A deep feature [1005] at the southern end of Trench had been cut from high in the deposit sequence (Figure 5), showing that this steep-sided ditch or pit was of relatively modern origin, and it had been back-filled with horticultural soil.

Figure 17
Top: Unstratified post-medieval glazed pottery and clay pipe stem
and pot sherds from fill (1004) within feature [1005]
Below Victorian glazed ceramic from (3001) and clay pipe stem from (4004)



Evidence for building demolition was provided by the large amounts of brick found in the soil, especially in Trench 1, where a white-washed area of the wall of the standing building on its eastern side suggested that a structure had been located against this wall at some time in the past (Figure 3). Historic mapping shows that the footprint of the building indeed extended over the area of Trench 1 during the early 20th century (Figure 6). The southern end of a small cobbled area was just clipped at the northern edge of Trench 1 which might have formed a courtyard for this structure, and it seems likely that the standing building and its demolished extension were possibly stables and a related coach house.

The lack of archaeological features or finds pre-dating the post-medieval period suggests that a substantial degree of truncation to the natural level might have resulted through Victorian and modern landscaping and construction. This may have removed buried features if any existed, although the amount of visibility of deeply stratified deposits provided by four trenches cannot be conclusive. Based on the results of this programme of trial trenching, however, it is unlikely that the permitted demolition and construction would be deep enough to cause damage, even if some unknown archaeological remains survive buried beneath the existing deposit sequence.

6.0 References

Henshaw & Associates October 2019: *WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION: Evaluation Pauls Moss, Whitchurch, Shropshire*

Historic England Listing Advice Report Case Number 1462851, Pauls Moss, Whitchurch, Salop 19th March 2019

APPENDIX 01

Context Record

Table 1: Context Record

Context	Description	Depth /m ⁻¹	Trench
1000	Concrete	0.15	1
1001	Topsoil, dark grey brown sandy silt with frequent brick inclusions	0.40	1
1002	Dark near-black made ground, very frequent brick rubble inclusions (<40%)	0.70	1
1003	Upper fill of square-cut linear feature [1004], redeposited natural	0.85	1
1004	Dark brownish grey sandy silt lower fill of linear feature [1005], few inclusions. Very dense, not fully excavated	Not reached	1
1005	Cut of linear feature, square profile, likely modern. Not fully excavated	Not reached	1
1006	Natural (sand)	Top min 0.8, max >1.2	1
1007	Clay sand in north-western half of trench	1.2->1.2	1
2000	Tarmac	0.10	2
2001	Roadstone	0.40	2
2002	Made ground-dark brown-grey clay silt, brick inclusions	0.8	2
2003	Natural	-	2
3000	Topsoil, dark grey brown sandy silt. Brick and tile inclusions	0.30	3

Context	Description	Depth /m ⁻¹	Trench
3001	Subsoil, very similar in composition to topsoil but slightly lighter greyish hue. Clay pipe stem find	0.60	3
3002	Light greyish brown clay sand with no inclusions, merging interface with natural. Present in SE part of trench, peters out halfway along	1.0	3
3003	Natural	-	3
4000	Topsoil, dark grey brown sandy silt. Brick and tile inclusions	0.45	4
4001	Cobbled layer, possibly related to construction of modern buildings (cobbles <100mm diameter, dark grey sandy matrix)	0.70	4
4002	Made ground-dark brown-grey clay silt, brick inclusions	1.10	4
4003	Buried soil of a mid-dark brownish grey hue and sandy silt composition, post-med pottery find	1.45	4
4004	Natural	-	4

EUROPEAN OFFICES

United Kingdom

AYLESBURY

T: +44 (0)1844 337380

BELFAST

belfast@slrconsulting.com

BRADFORD-ON-AVON

T: +44 (0)1225 309400

BRISTOL

T: +44 (0)117 906 4280

CARDIFF

T: +44 (0)29 2049 1010

CHELMSFORD

T: +44 (0)1245 392170

EDINBURGH

T: +44 (0)131 335 6830

EXETER

T: + 44 (0)1392 490152

GLASGOW

T: +44 (0)141 353 5037

GUILDFORD

T: +44 (0)1483 889800

LONDON

T: +44 (0)203 805 6418

MAIDSTONE

T: +44 (0)1622 609242

MANCHESTER (Denton)

T: +44 (0)161 549 8410

MANCHESTER (Media City)

T: +44 (0)161 872 7564

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

T: +44 (0)191 261 1966

NOTTINGHAM

T: +44 (0)115 964 7280

SHEFFIELD

T: +44 (0)114 245 5153

SHREWSBURY

T: +44 (0)1743 23 9250

STIRLING

T: +44 (0)1786 239900

WORCESTER

T: +44 (0)1905 751310

Ireland

DUBLIN

T: + 353 (0)1 296 4667

France

GRENOBLE

T: +33 (0)6 23 37 14 14