An Archaeological Watching Brief

at the Old Crown, Deritend, Birmingham

1998

(SMR 01251)

1.0 Summary

The main range of the Old Crown is a Grade II* listed timber-framed building. Following on from an evaluation carried out in 1994, which recorded the presence of medieval deposits and which suggested that a medieval pottery production centre was located within the immediate vicinity of the Old Crown (Litherland *et al* 1994), an archaeological watching brief was carried out during the modification and extension of the Old Crown from June 1997 - June 1998. This confirmed the results of the earlier evaluation, in that archaeological deposits were seen to survive as 'islands' across the site, in between Victorian and later disturbances. A number of features, such as a ditch which ran parallel to Heath Mill Lane and two sandstone foundation blocks in the old Stable Block, may represent medieval features. Although no kiln structures were recorded, the recovery of further pieces of Deritend ware from Trench 4 (Section C) and Trench 8 strengthens the evidence regarding a local medieval pottery production centre, and highlights the need for further archaeological investigation and research which would further our understanding of this medieval industry.

2.0 Introduction (Figure 1)

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief which was carried out during the modification and extension of the Old Crown building (NGR SP 0800 8632). The archaeological fieldwork was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of Oakcombe Limited between June 1997 and June 1998.

An archaeological evaluation had been carried out in July 1994 (Litherland *et al* 1994). This had identified 'islands' of surviving archaeology across the site, including a pit which contained a large assemblage of 14th-century Deritend ware and an associated occupation deposit, also dated to the 14th century. The subsequent archaeological watching brief was carried out in accordance with a Design Brief prepared by Birmingham City Council (Hodder 1995), which is included here as Appendix 1, and a Specification prepared by BUFAU (Mould 1997). The guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994) were followed.

3.0 Site Location and Archaeological Background

The Old Crown is a late-15th-century timber-framed building, with later additions. It is a Grade II* listed building which is located on the north side of Deritend (NGR SP 0800 8632). The Old Crown is the only complete medieval standing building in Birmingham's city centre, and it has been intensively documented by the 19th century historian Toulmin-Smith. More recently, a structural study and documentary research were carried out (Price 1993). This was followed by an archaeological evaluation in July 1994 which revealed islands of surviving archaeological deposits. These included cobbled yard surfaces, a layer containing 14th-century pottery and burnt material and a pit which contained similar material. The deposits were recorded at approximately 0.40m below the present concrete yard surface. The pottery consisted almost exclusively of Deritend Ware wasters, which may be dated to the 14th century. The evaluation evidence indicated that this pottery was being manufactured on, or close to, the site. The lack of documentary and archaeological evidence for a medieval pottery industry in Birmingham makes the site particularly important.

Trial pits dug in March 1995 to observe the foundations of pillars supporting the old Stable Block in the east of the backyard revealed further medieval deposits overlying natural subsoil.

4.0 Objective

The objective of this archaeological watching brief was to monitor all below-ground works and to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains affected by the proposed development.

5.0 Method

The objectives were achieved through a series of site visits during contractors' groundworks. This was complemented by salvage recording where appropriate. No excavation of archaeological features was undertaken. Specific monitoring visits were made whilst the following were being undertaken:

a) Excavation of a foundation trench for a new wall on east side of site (Trench 8).
b) Excavation of a foundation trench for a conservatory around rear entrance (Trench 2).
c) Exposure of a blue-brick surface (Paviour surface).
d) Installation of surface drainage (Trenches 1, 3-7).

The stages of work in each case were:

a) Observation during and following each of the above.
b) Recording of any archaeological deposits/features likely to be associated with medieval pottery manufacture. No excavation was undertaken beyond the

cleaning of exposed deposits for better definition. Artefacts were retrieved and processed.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeological deposits or features were present. Contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

6.0 Archaeological Results (Figures 2 and 3; Plates 1 -6)

The subsoil varied in make-up and depth across the site, ranging from river terrace gravels to red sand-clay, and was recorded at depths ranging between 0.30m and 1.20m.

Trench 1 (Figure 2)
(0.55m x 4m, excavated to a depth of 0.85m)

Trench 1 was a drainage trench which was excavated through the internal floor of the Old Crown building.

In the southeast-facing section, a series of charcoal-flecked sand-silt deposits were cut by four courses of machine-bricks. These were sealed by a layer of sandstone blocks which provided a foundation for a further three courses of machine-bricks. A concrete floor overlaid the uppermost machine-bricks.

In the southwest-facing section, the gravely, clay-sand subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.60m. It was overlaid by a thin layer of charcoal-flecked sand-silt which was, in turn, overlaid by a layer of cobbles. The cobbles were sealed by a thick layer of compacted charcoal and mortar-flecked structural debris. A concrete floor sealed this debris.

A vaulted cellar roof was recorded at the southeastern end of Trench 1. It was overlaid by a series of levelling deposits which were sealed by a concrete floor.

There were no datable finds from any of the above deposits.

Trench 2 (Figure 2)
(0.60m x 10m, excavated to a depth of 1.30m)

This trench utilised the course of an earlier service pipe, minimising any impact on the below-ground deposits.

The sand-gravel subsoil, recorded at a depth of 0.75m, was cut by a 1m deep brick foundation for the rear range of the Old Crown building, and by a putative north-south aligned ditch, which was recorded at the base of Trench 2. The ditch was filled with a

grey-brown, sand deposit, which contained a high percentage of cobbles. These may have related to a cobbled yard surface recorded in the earlier evaluation Trench B. A series of post-medieval levelling deposits were recorded in the remainder of the trench. They were sealed by a modern concrete and hardcore surface.

There were no datable finds from any of the above deposits.

Trench 3 (Figure 2; Plates 1 and 2)
(0.80m-1.10m x 7.20m, excavated to a depth of 1.40m).

Trench 3 partially transected Evaluation Trench B. Black plastic, which was laid on the bottom of the evaluation trench, is visible in the sections shown on Plates 1 and 2.

The mixed greenish gravely sandy-clay and red-orange clay subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.70m. It was cut, at the northwestern end of the trench, by two walls, whose relationship had been erased by Trench 3. The machine-brick walls each survived to six courses. A concrete deposit was recorded on their southeastern side, whilst a black ash deposit was recorded on their northwestern side. The subsoil was also cut by a service pipe which was encased by eight courses of bricks. The lower two courses were represented by bricks re-used from a blue-brick paviour surface which extended northeast from the Old Crown building. The uppermost deposits within the southeastern half of Trench 3 comprised the backfill of Evaluation Trench B.

There were no datable finds from any of the above deposits.

Trench 4 (Figure 3)
(0.50m wide x *c.*45.50m, excavated to a depth of 0.35m-0.70m).

The subsoil was cut at the southeastern end of Trench 4 (Section A) by a foundation trench for a former outbuilding, which had been filled with a black ashy deposit. A machine-brick wall was recorded in the southeast-facing section. Further to the northwest, the subsoil was partially overlaid by a cobbled surface. This was sealed by a thick deposit of charcoal-flecked grey-brown, stony, clay-sand-silt, which was, in turn, sealed by a layer of modern structural debris.

As Trench 4 curved around towards the northwest (Section B), it transected two machine-brick walls of a former outbuilding. Within the northwest-southeast aligned section of Trench 4 (Section C), the subsoil was cut by two features which were filled with a grey clayey silt-sand deposit, and which contained late-17th - early-18th century pottery sherds. The extent and character of the two cuts could not be established. A grey, mortary silt-sand deposit extended across the whole trench, and was cut at the southeastern end by a north-south aligned feature, filled with a mortary-silt-sand deposit. The feature was sealed by a layer of orange sand. At the northwestern end of Section C, the grey, mortary silt-sand deposit was overlaid by a layer of black ash. This was sealed by modern structural debris.

Within the northwestern arm of Trench 4 (Section D), which was located alongside Heath Mill Lane, the stony red-brown clay-sand subsoil was overlaid by a layer of black ash. This was sealed by a grey-brown clay-silt-sand. This, in turn, was overlaid by an orange mortar layer. A cut at the centre of the trench was filled with modern material.

Late-17th - early-18th century pottery sherds were recovered from two cut features in Section C. Clay pipe and animal bone fragments were recovered from the uppermost deposits, whilst three sherds of 14th century Deritend pottery were recovered from the spoil of Trench 4 (Section C).

Trench 5 (Figure 3; Plates 3 and 4)
(1m x 5m, excavated to a depth of 1.6m)

Trench 5 ran parallel to Heath Mill Lane. Although the trench originally extended further along Heath Mill Lane, only a 5m long section was recorded, the remainder having been concreted prior to the requested site visit. The northwestern arm (Section D) of Trench 4 ran adjacent and Trench 9 ran parallel to the concreted area. Deposits within those trenches contained evidence for late-17th - early-18th century and 20th century activity.

The red-brown gravel-sand subsoil was recorded at a depth of 1.20m in Trench 5. It was cut by a ditch which ran parallel to Heath Mill Lane. The ditch, whose profile was not seen in full, was filled with a brown-black, stony, clay-silt deposit, similar to that recorded in the earlier evaluation trenches. These were all cut, at the centre of the trench, by a clamped-brick wall which was aligned at a right-angle to Heath Mill Lane, and by the foundation cut for a modern boundary wall, which formed the northern limit of the Old Crown site. A silty-ash deposit overlay the brown-black stony, clay-silt deposit and was itself sealed by a modern yard surface.

There were no datable finds from any of the above deposits.

Trench 6 (Figure 3)
(U-shaped: 2.20m x 1.50m; excavated to a maximum depth of 0.75m)

The red-brown, clayey, gravel-sand subsoil, which included lenses of compacted red-brown clay-sand, was recorded at a depth of 0.40m-0.65m. In the south-facing section it was partially sealed by a 0.10m-0.42m thick layer of 'dirty' subsoil. Both deposits were overlaid by a charcoal-flecked, grey-black, silty, clay-gravel-sand which, at the western end of Trench 6, was truncated by a wall foundation cut. Within the foundation cut, in the east-facing section, a machine-brick wall was packed-in with a deposit of black cinders and clean, red-brown clay. The wall was sealed by a thin layer of loose, grey-black silty-sand, containing brick fragments. This would have formed the foundation for a concrete floor within the Stable Block which was *in situ* during the evaluation in 1994, but which was removed during the more recent groundworks. In the west-facing section, the charcoal-flecked, grey-black, silty clay-

gravel-sand layer was truncated by a cut containing a large, square sandstone block. A similar sandstone block was recorded at the southeastern end of the old Stable Block. Both blocks were left *in situ* and were sealed beneath a new concrete floor level. They are marked on Figure 3 as black squares located within the old Stable Block.

Two post-medieval pottery sherds and one glass fragment were recovered from Trench 6.

Trench 7 (Figure 3)
(3.8m x 0.60m; excavated to a maximum depth of 0.75m).

The moist, yellow-orange-brown, clayey, gravel-sand subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.30m. A slow flow of water was noted at the base of the trench. The subsoil was sealed by a 0.10m-0.50m thick deposit of charcoal-flecked 'dirty' subsoil. This was overlaid in the south-facing section by a charcoal and cinder-flecked layer of brown-black silty sand which included brick fragments. In the west-facing section it was overlaid by a thin deposit of black-grey clayey-sand which had a high cinder content (5003), and which was itself overlaid by a line of well-bonded clamped-bricks. These were set at a slightly different angle to a layer of machine-bricks immediately above. The machine-bricks were sealed by a thin layer of concrete which provided a foundation for the eastern exterior wall of the Stable Block, and for an associated buttress.

There were no datable finds from any of the above deposits.

Trench 8 (Figure 3)
(18m x 0.75m, hand excavated to a depth of 1m)

Trench 8 followed the line of an existing wall foundation, and partially transected Evaluation Trench A.

The mixed grey-white clay and orange-brown sand-clay subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.45m. In the east-facing section, the subsoil was overlaid by a thick layer of structural debris which may have represented the fill of an earlier wall-foundation trench, the alignment of which was followed by Trench 8. The debris was overlaid by a blue-brick paviour yard surface, which was truncated in places by modern steel foundation cuts and by Evaluation Trench A. A modern concrete floor sealed the paviour surface.

The stratigraphy within the west-facing section was similar to that recorded in the east-facing section, with the exception of a charcoal-flecked grey-brown silty-sand-clay which overlaid the subsoil and which was sealed by a series of levelling deposits. This series was overlaid by the blue-brick paviour surface.

At the northern end of Trench 8 the subsoil was cut by two red-brick walls. One, comprising seven-courses, ran parallel to Trench 8, whilst the second wall was aligned northwest-southeast.

Four sherds of 14th-century Deritend ware and twenty large pieces of glass, possibly from late-17th - early-18th century jugs (Bevan *pers. comm.*), were recovered from Trench 8, along with three post-medieval sherds and an undated iron artefact.

Trench 9 (Figure 3)
(14m x 0.60m, excavated to a depth of 0.60m)
Trench 9 ran parallel to the concreted continuation of Trench 5 which represented the boundary with Heath Mill Lane. Trench 9 was located *c.* 1.50m to the southeast of the Heath Mill Lane boundary and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.60m. The subsoil was not contacted in this trench. The remains of a northwest-southeast aligned red-brick wall foundation was recorded with a number of east-west service pipes. A black ash layer was recorded on either side of the wall foundations, at the base of the trench. This layer was sealed by a deposit of building debris.

Pottery dating to the 20th century was recovered from the building debris.

Blue-brick Paviour surface (Figure 3; Plates 5 and 6)
Observation of the removal, by machine, of recent deposits overlying the blue-brick paviour surface in the back yard of the Old Crown, was carried out as part of the watching brief. Sapcotes lifted the paviours upon instruction of Karl Grace Design and Associates. This operation, which may have affected underlying archaeological deposits, was not monitored as no notification was received.

Table 1: Levels on archaeological deposits (Above Ordnance Datum)

Subsoil	103.60m - 104.72m
14th century occupation layer	104.81m
14th century pit	104.67m
Cobble surface	104.88m
Paviour surface	105.50m

7.0 The Artefacts

A small assemblage of medieval and post-medieval artefacts was recovered during the watching brief. Seven sherds of Deritend ware pottery were recovered from Trenches 4 and 8, but no further evidence of any kiln superstructure was recorded. The sherds from Trench 8 were found within the immediate area of the pit recorded in Evaluation Trench A, but were not recovered from a secure context. The large pieces of possible glass jugs, from Trench 8, were dated to the late-17th - early-18th century.

A post-medieval ceramic base was recovered from the uppermost layer in Trench 6, and a sherd of post-medieval pottery was recovered from the fill of the machine-brick wall foundation cut.

Table 2: Quantification and dating of artefact assemblage

Trench	Artefact	Quantity	Dating
1	-	-	-
2	-	-	-
3	-	-	-
4	Pottery sherds	3	14th century, Deritend ware
	Pottery sherds	9	Post-medieval
	Clay pipe fragments	5	Post-medieval
	Animal bone fragments	3	-
5	-	-	-
6	Pottery sherds	2	Post-medieval
	Glass fragment	1	-
7	-	-	-
8	Pottery sherds	4	14th century, Deritend ware
	Pottery sherds	3	Post-medieval
	?Glass Jug fragments	20	late-17th/early-18th century
	Iron artefact	1	-
U/S	Clay pipe bowl	2	Post-medieval
	Pottery sherds	2	Post-medieval

8.0 Discussion

The reuse of existing foundation and service trenches throughout the modification and extension of the Old Crown ensured that, within the areas observed, the impact on surviving archaeological deposits and features was minimal, and that the deposits were preserved *in situ* for the future.

The subsoil varied in make-up and depth across the site. The relatively shallow level recorded in Trenches 6 and 7 was similar to that seen in Evaluation Trenches A and B, but this contrasted with the depth of 1.20m recorded in the northwestern part of the site (Trench 5).

As in the evaluation, a dirty subsoil horizon was recorded across the majority of the site. It was cut, in Trench 5, by a ditch which ran parallel to the present-day Heath Mill Lane, and it is possible that this feature may represent an early property boundary. The ditch was filled with a deposit which also overlaid the subsoil - a deep layer of 'garden soil', whose accumulation suggests an increase in activity within what would have been, in the 14th century, the backplot area of the site. Structural activity within the medieval backplot may be represented by two sandstone blocks recorded within the post-medieval Stable Block. Clamped-bricks, which were recorded in the west-facing section of Trench 6 on a slightly different alignment to the modern wall, represent the remains of an earlier post-medieval building. Other post-medieval deposits, comprising cobbled and paviour surfaces, service trenches, levelling deposits and structural debris, were recorded across the site.

Evaluation of the site suggested that, in the 14th century, pottery was being manufactured on, or close to, the site. The results of the watching brief found no evidence of any kiln structures, and it now seems likely that the pottery production was located outside the bounds of the Old Crown site. The lack of documentary evidence relating to this industry increases the importance of any surviving archaeological deposits and features, and the potential for investigation of this industry now lies with any future development in the immediate Deritend area.

9.0 References

Hodder, M. 1995 *Brief for archaeological watching brief during development at The Old Crown, Deritend.*

Litherland, S., Mould, C. And Ratkai, S. 1994 *The Old Crown Inn, Deritend, Birmingham: An Archaeological Evaluation.* BUFAU Report 310.

Mould, C. 1997 *Archaeological Specification: Archaeological Watching Brief. The Old Crown, Deritend, Birmingham (SMR WM 01251).*

Price, S. 1993 *The Old Crown Inn, Deritend, Birmingham: A report on its history and development.*

10.0 Acknowledgements

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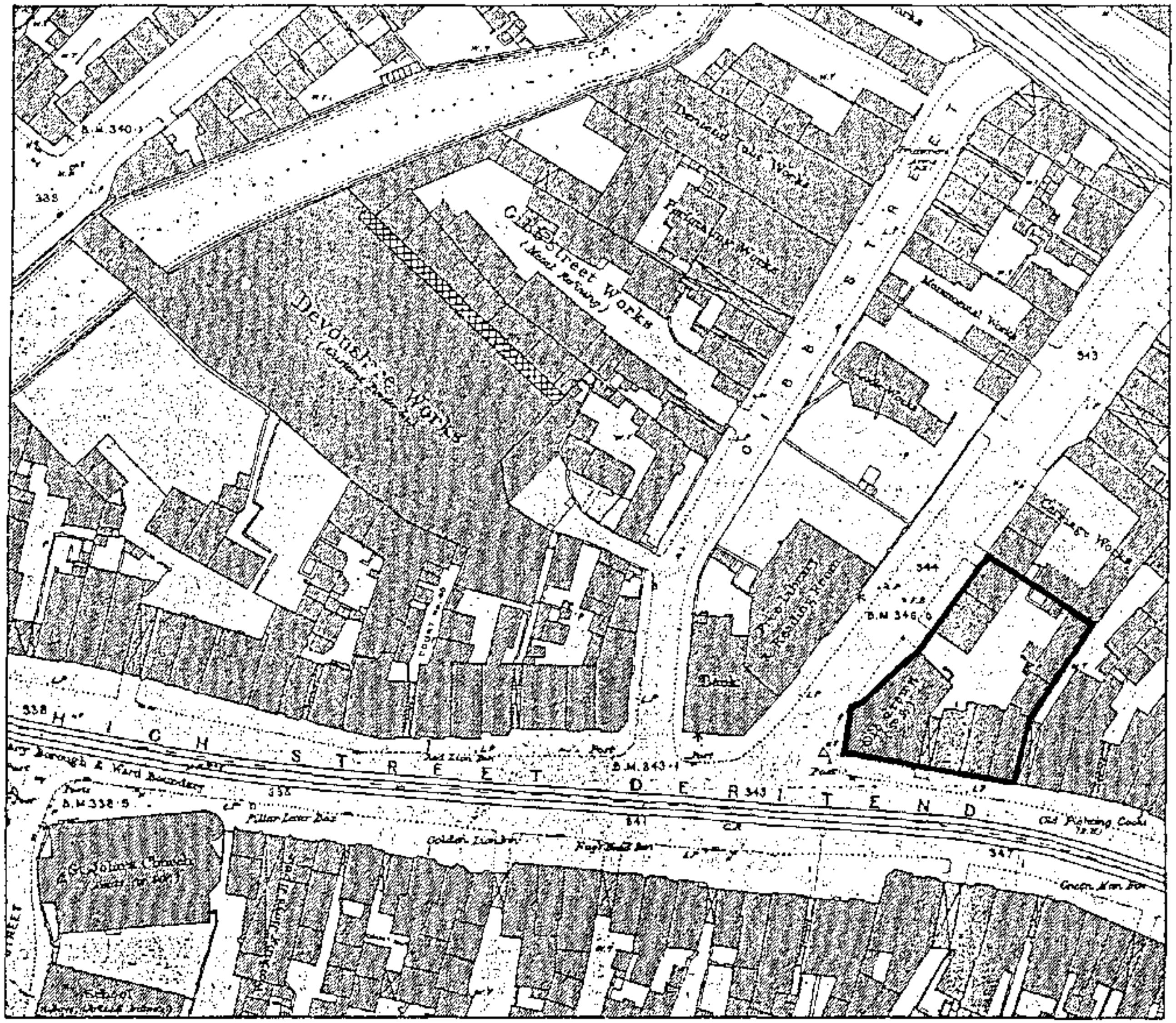

HIGH STREET
DERITEND
Gibb Street Works
Pillar Letter Box
Golden Lion Inn
Old Fishing Cock
Green Man P.H.
Bank

Fig 1

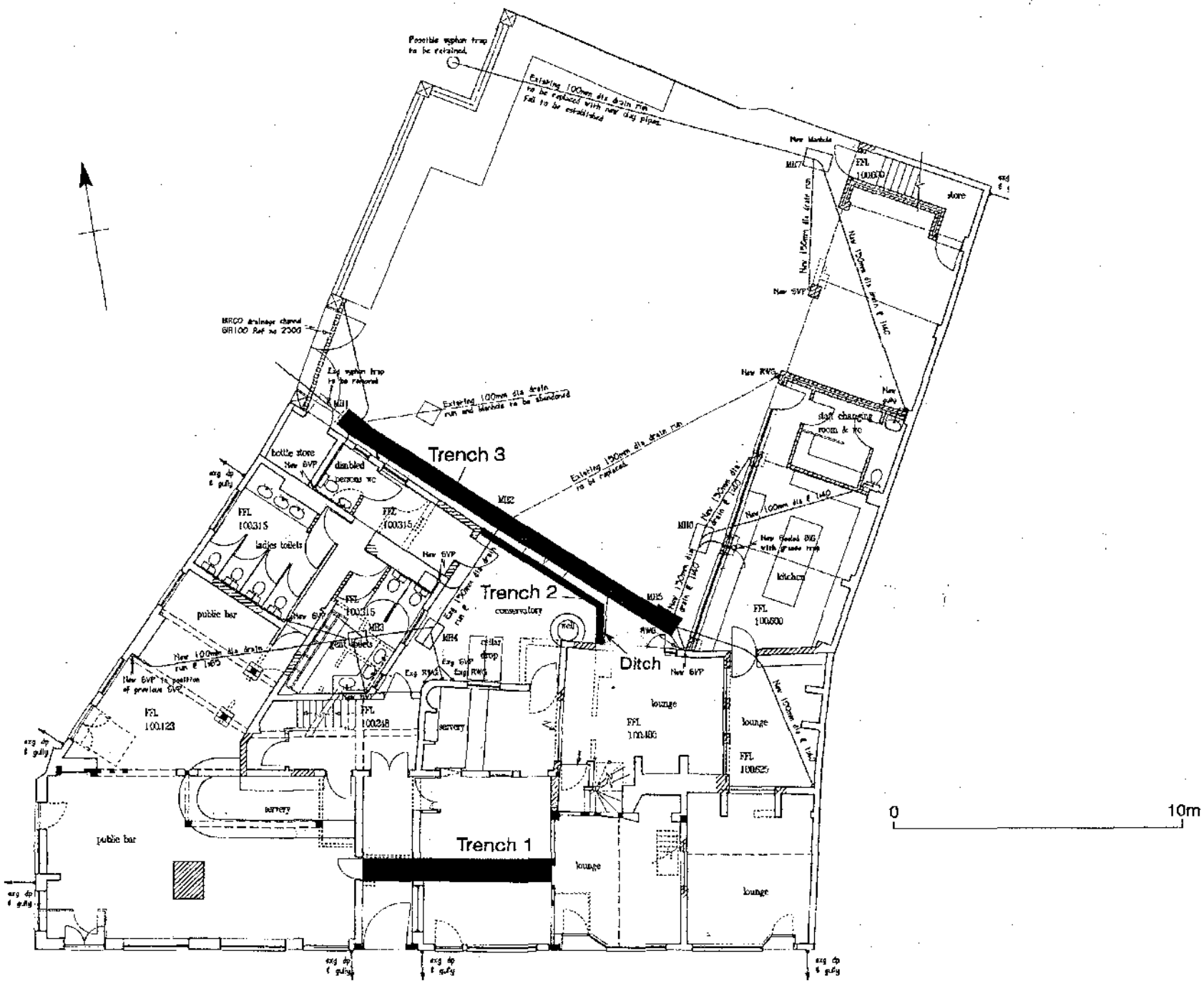

Fig 2

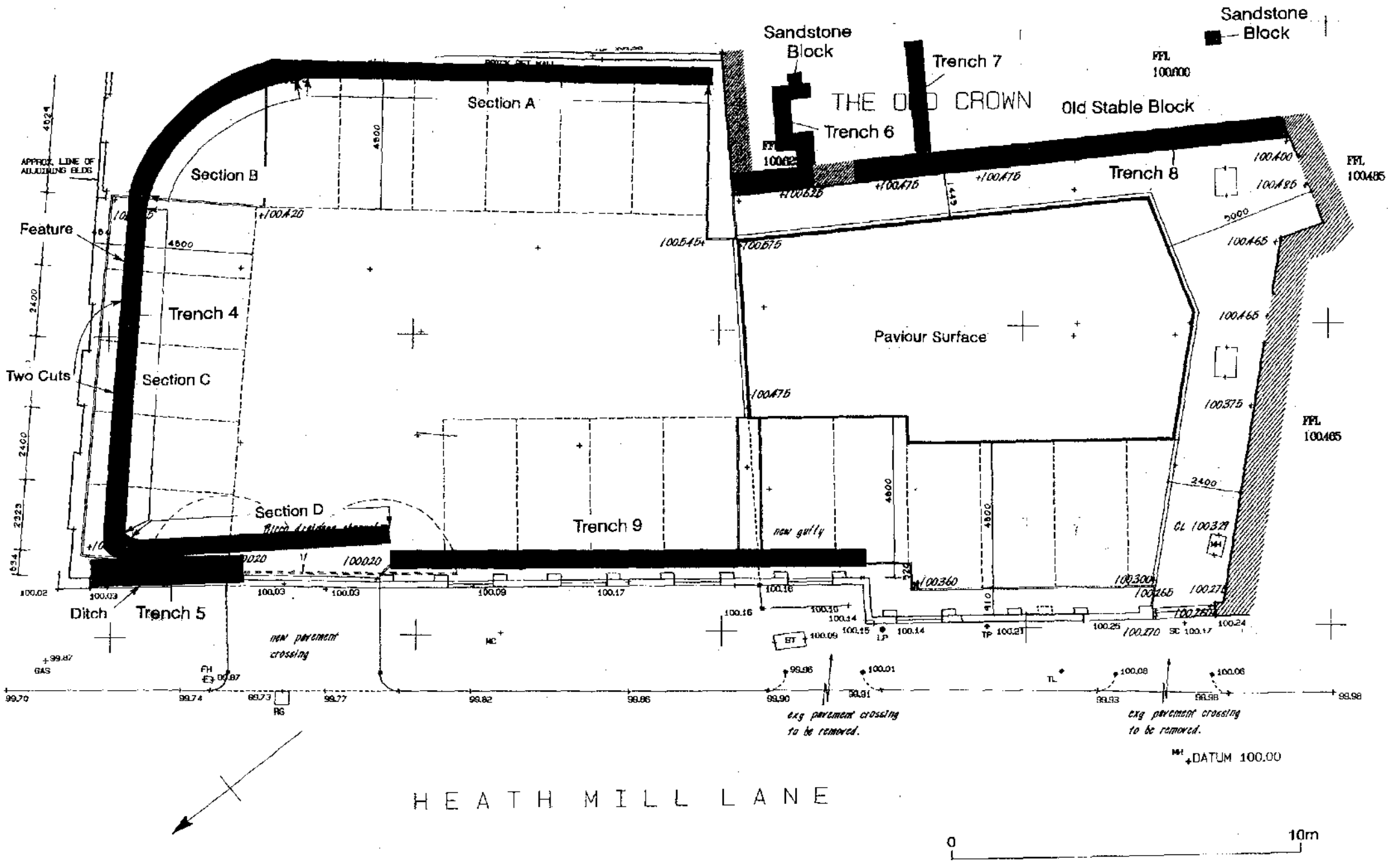
Sandstone Block
Trench 7
Sandstone Block
THE OLD CROWN
Old Stable Block
Trench 6
Trench 8
Section A
Section B
Feature
Trench 4
Two Cuts
Section C
Section D
Trench 9
Paviour Surface
new gully
Ditch
Trench 5
new pavement crossing
exg pavement crossing to be removed.
exg pavement crossing to be removed.
HEATH MILL LANE
DATUM 100.00
0
10m

Fig 3

Plate 1: Trench 3. Machine-brick walls in foreground, subsoil with overlying post-medieval deposits in background. Black plastic sealing base of Evaluation Trench B visible in Trench 3 sections.

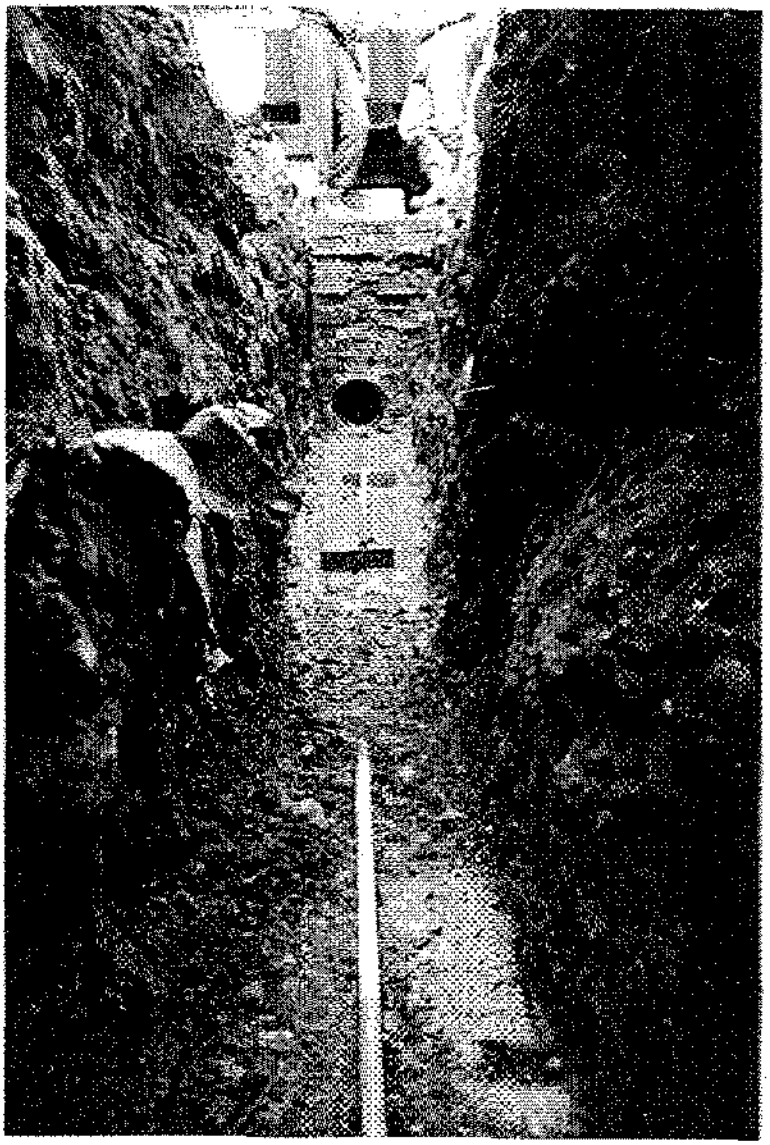

Plate 2: Trench 3. Looking towards manhole which reuses blue-bricks from paviour surface.

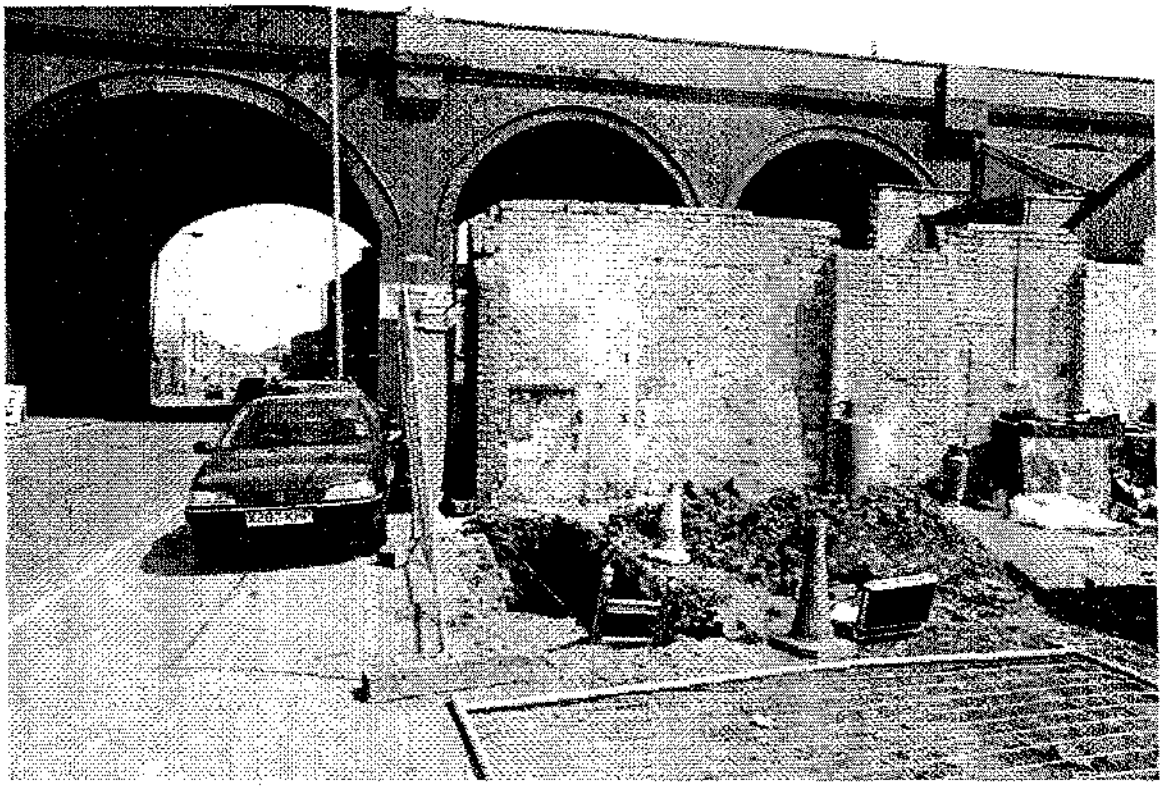

Plate 3: Trench 5. Looking towards northern boundary of Old Crown site.

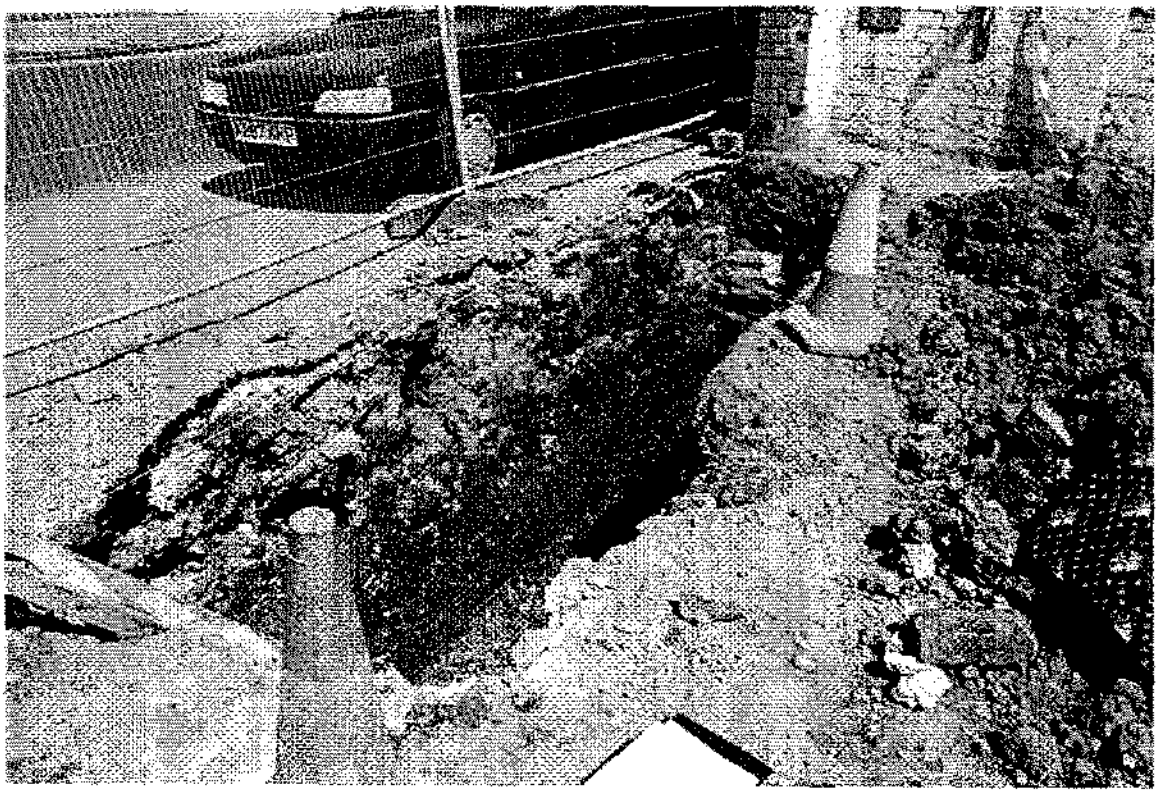

Plate 4: Trench 5. Southeast-facing section.

Plate 5: Removal of deposits overlying blue-brick paviour surface.

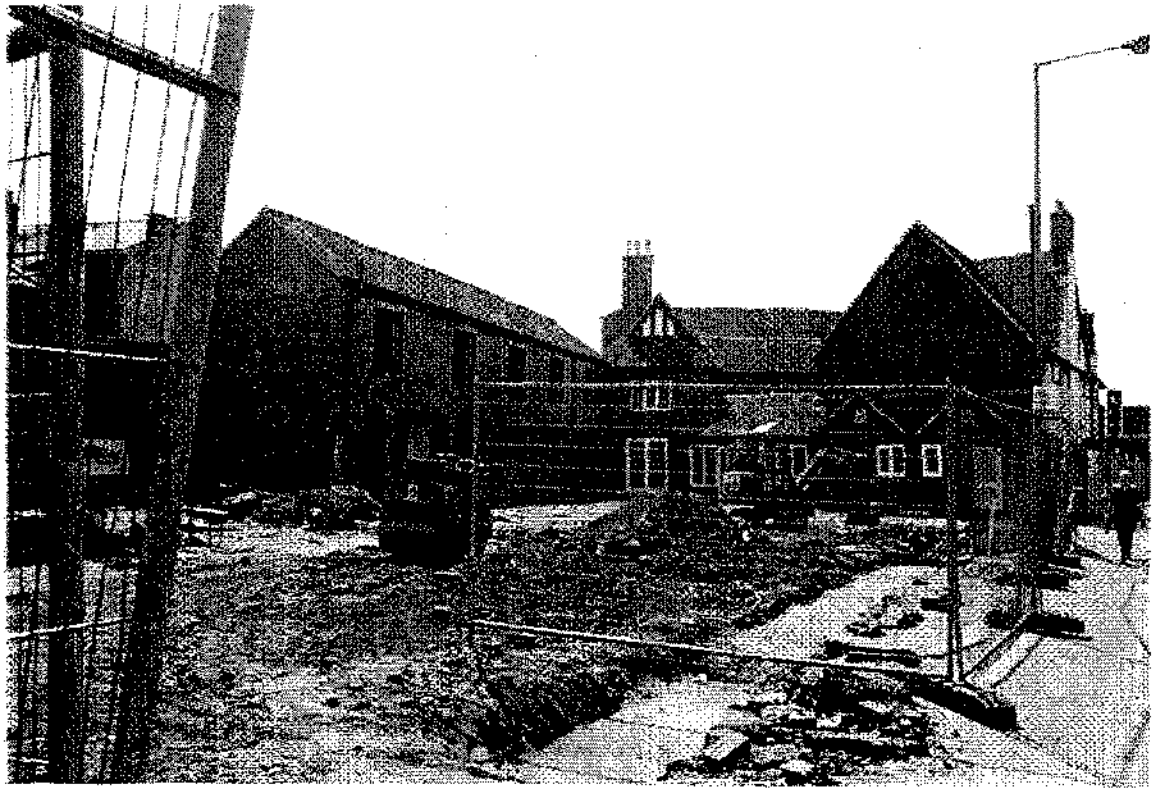

Plate 6: Removal of deposits overlying blue-brick paviour surface.