



An Archaeological Watching Brief at 33 Bidston Village Road, Bidston, Wirral. Site Code 145 Final Report



Prepared for Alan Maxwell



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Non-Technical Summary

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief at 33 Bidston Village Road, Bidston, Wirral. The project took place in advance of the construction of an extension to the existing house.

The site lies on the fringes of the historic core of the village which has produced evidence of Prehistoric, Roman and medieval settlement.

The only deposits present were a humic topsoil over sandstone bedrock. Three features cut into bedrock to the rear of the house probably relate to the cottage which was erected for a toll bar keeper in the mid-19th century. The top soil contained small quantities of early 19th to early 20th century ceramics which were probably present as a result of the casual disposal of domestic debris from the cottage.

No other archaeological deposits were present.

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1. Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief conducted at 33 Bidston Village Road, Bidston, Wirral. The project was conducted on behalf of Mr. Alan Maxwell (hereafter the Client). The project is part of a scheme of archaeological mitigation required as part the planning condition imposed by Wirral Council (Ref APP/12/00636).

The site is located in the core of the village of Bidston and is centred on National Grid Reference SJ 285 902 (Fig. 1). The project took place during the construction of an extension to the existing house (Fig. 2).

The extension measures c. 6 m x 6 m in plan and is broadly rectangular in plan (Fig. 2) and lies on a lawned area to the rear (east) of the existing house (Plate 1). The existing house has been constructed onto a small terrace cut into the slope from Bidston Hill and there is a drop of c. 1 to 1.5 m from the lawn to the house. Bedrock was visible in the terrace cut to the rear of the house c. 0.5 m below the present ground surface and was believed to be shallower to the east

2. Methodology

Fieldwork was undertaken on 3 August 2012 by Dr. M. Adams (Senior Archaeological Project Officer NMLFAU).

All excavation was undertaken as specified in the project design (Adams 2012) though conventional planning was supplemented by the use of three dimensional models produced using Autodesk 123D Catch. This software generates three dimensional models from digital images. These can be scaled and then converted to conventional CAD dwg files and the software is being evaluated by NMLFAU as a supplement to conventional recording strategies.

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

The site lies in the historic core of Bidston which is designated a Conservation Area by Wirral Borough Council. Whilst several Listed Buildings are situated within the village, none are directly affected by the present project.

There is little evidence for prehistoric settlement within the township beyond a chance find of Neolithic polished stone axe (Harris & Thacker 1987, 53) and Mesolithic flint from an excavation at Church Farm to the south (Cleary et al 1992). Evidence of cross ploughing has been claimed at Bidston Hill (Harris & Thacker 1987, 104-5) and this may indicate Prehistoric agriculture, though this remains unsubstantiated.

This reflects a wider pattern on the Wirral where the nature of Prehistoric settlement remains uncertain. The only excavated sites on the Wirral are a Mesolithic site at Greasby (R. Cowell, pers. comm.) and the Bronze Age phases at Irby (Philpott & Adams 2010). There are no excavated Iron Age sites on the Wirral, though the finds evidence from Meols (Griffiths et al 2007) and Irby (Philpott & Adams 2010) suggests that this reflects the historic lack of research and excavation in the area, rather than an actual lack of such sites.

The Roman period is similarly under represented in Bidston, though Roman pottery was found at Church Farm (Cleary et al 1992) and a coin of Maximilian (286-305 AD) has been found in the churchyard (ibid) and it is likely that for this period too, the lack of excavated sites reflects the historic neglect of research rather than an actual absence of sites. A watching brief at School Lane found some evidence for Roman and Prehistoric settlement (Adams 2011).

There is significant evidence for Norse settlement in the area in the form of a miniature Norse 'Hogback' tomb or grave marker dating to the 10th century found in the garden of 19 School Lane in the 1990s (Bailey & Whalley 2006, Bailey 2010, 49) and assumed to be originally from the churchyard. Monuments of this type are rare in lowland North-West England and Bailey identifies the small group of these monuments found along the Wirral and Lancashire coast with traders and/or settlers with links to Hiberno-Norse groups in North Yorkshire or Cumbria.

This find should be viewed against a context in which direct evidence for Norse settlement is very rare in North-West England, the only excavated site on the Wirral is at Irby (Philpott & Adams 2010) where sections of foundation trench were identified as the foundations of 'bow-sided' buildings characteristic of Norse settlement. However, the dating of the Irby buildings was based entirely upon their position in the stratigraphic sequence and parallels with buildings elsewhere.

The evidence described above is broadly consistent with a wider pattern in the historic core of Wirral villages in which finds evidence suggests that many may have origins in the Roman or early post-Roman periods. However, little excavation has taken place in these village cores (indeed in similar sites across Merseyside) and the nature of the archaeological resource consequently remains poorly understood.

Although the village is not named in the Domesday Survey of 1086, the placename Bidston is first mentioned in a document of 1272, the street pattern and circular form of the churchyard are characteristic of early, perhaps Pre-conquest, settlement. The church is first mentioned in a document of 1288 but is likely to be an older foundation. The dedication of the church to St. Oswald may be ancient, though it is not clear when it was first applied to the church and it may be a later rededication.

The earliest written forms of the placename are Bideston (1272), Bediston (1260), Bodestan (1260) and Budestan (1286) which Dodgson (1972, 308) interprets as deriving from the Old English bytle/bydle (building) and stan (stone) giving 'building on a rock', though other derivations are possible. However, the Old English origins of the name further suggest that a settlement was present prior to the Norman Conquest, though it does not appear to have been considered sufficiently important to have been included in the Domesday Survey.

A watching brief at School Lane in 2011 (Adams 2011) found a shallow gully c. 4.4 m long and three post-holes. The gully contained three fragments of medieval pottery dating to the 13th to 14th centuries AD and was probably part of the foundations to a 'bowsided' building, a form commonly associated with Norse long-houses of the 9th

to 11th century AD, though the evidence from School Lane suggests that this building tradition may have persisted for longer on the Wirral. The post-holes contained no dateable material and it was not clear whether they were related to the building or not. Finds of debris from iron smithing, a possible quernstone (portable millstone) and a fire-cracked stone may suggest that there was Prehistoric and/or Roman activity in the area and add to a broader picture of early medieval settlement in Wirral, Cheshire and South Lancashire being focused around earlier sites. Late Medieval documentation suggests that in the early 16th century the village was composed of seven farms (Cleary et al 1992, 1) and it is likely that Stone Farm to the immediate south of the site was one of these. It is likely that this pattern of dispersed farms, rather than a nucleated village core, represents a persistence of earlier settlement patterns.

The earliest map of the area is the Kingston Survey of 1665 (Fig. 3) which shows no buildings on the present site which seems to have lain in an area then known as 'Hall Paddock'.

The Bidston Tithe Map (Fig. 4) was surveyed in 1842 and shows the site as part of Plot 225, no land use is given though it was known as 'Summerhouse Hill and was owned and occupied by Robert Vyner. However, no buildings are shown on the present site which was on or adjacent to a small area of woodland.

The First Edition OS 25 inch to the mile sheet published in 1875 (Fig. 5) is the first map to show the cottage which was built as a toll bar cottage for the turnpike road through Bidston. The road through Bidston was probably turnpiked in the early 19th century, though the map evidence above suggests that Toll Bar Cottage was a later, probably mid-19th century addition.

In conclusion the extension lies in an area of potential Roman and early medieval settlement which has not been significantly disturbed since at least the mid-17th century. It therefore has potential for the presence of deposits relating to Roman, early medieval and/or medieval settlement.

4. Results of the Excavation

Dismantling of the stone revetment wall to the rear of the cottage revealed three sub-rectangular cuts into bedrock (Plate 2). The two to the north measured 0.77 m north-south and 0.3 m east west and were 0.52 m deep. The southern most measured 1.25 m north-south and 0.3 m east-west and was c. 100 mm deep. The function and date of these was not clear but they presumably relate to the cottage.

The excavation consisted of a single trench measuring c. 7 x 7 m and placed within the footprint of the extension as shown on Fig. 2.

Top soil and subsoil were removed using a mechanical excavator supplied by the client and operated under the supervision of an archaeologist. These deposits were thinnest at the western end of the trench where they were c. 0.5 m deep in total. At the eastern end of the trench top soil was 0.70 m thick.

Top soil was excavated directly to bedrock across most of the site. A thin (< 30 mm thick) mid-grey sandy subsoil was present in some areas and in the south-eastern corner of the trench appeared to fill a cut feature (Plate 3). However, hand excavation found no evidence that this was anything other than a natural variation in the depth of bedrock.

5. Finds Evidence

All of the finds from the site consisted of 19th and 20th century ceramics, glass from top soil. The general nature of this material is characteristic of the disposal of domestic rubbish on rural sites on Wirral and south Lancashire and it will not be reported upon in detail here.

6. Conclusions

No archaeological deposits or artefacts earlier than c. 1800 AD were found and the site appears to lie outside the densest area of early settlement in Bidston.

7. Recommendations for Further Mitigation

No further mitigation is required on this site and construction can proceed with no further archaeological requirements.

8. Evaluation of Autodesk 123D Catch

The models generated by 123D Catch consist of raster images draped over a vector mesh. This contrasts with the point cloud data generated by software such as My3dScanner. The model can be panned, tilted and zoomed and has a photorealistic appearance. It is also possible to scale the model and export directly to CAD.

The main advantage of this software is that it is possible to generate vertical images of an excavation without the need for a photographic tower (Plates 4 and 5). In areas of difficult access or where time is limited it should be possible to use these as the basis of plan drawings.

The images provided have a more realistic appearance than the point cloud data provided by My3dScanner, with the superficial appearance of photographs and this gives a more detailed record. The mesh data can be exported to CAD but it is not clear from this experiment how these compare to conventional drawings. The likelihood is that the quality of the record is poor, though the files can be easily scaled to real world measurements (unlike My3dScanner) and it potentially has applications in recording of standing buildings.

However, the software produces some distortions in the record (Plate 5) which appear to be a result of the melding of the raster and vector data. It is possible that this would be overcome by taking more digital images on site (sample files on Autodesk's site do not show such severe distortion) thus increasing the mesh density.

In summary this software is a valuable addition to the available repertoire of recording strategies but is a supplement to, not a replacement for, the conventional drawn record.

9. Figures



Fig. 1. Site Location. Not to scale

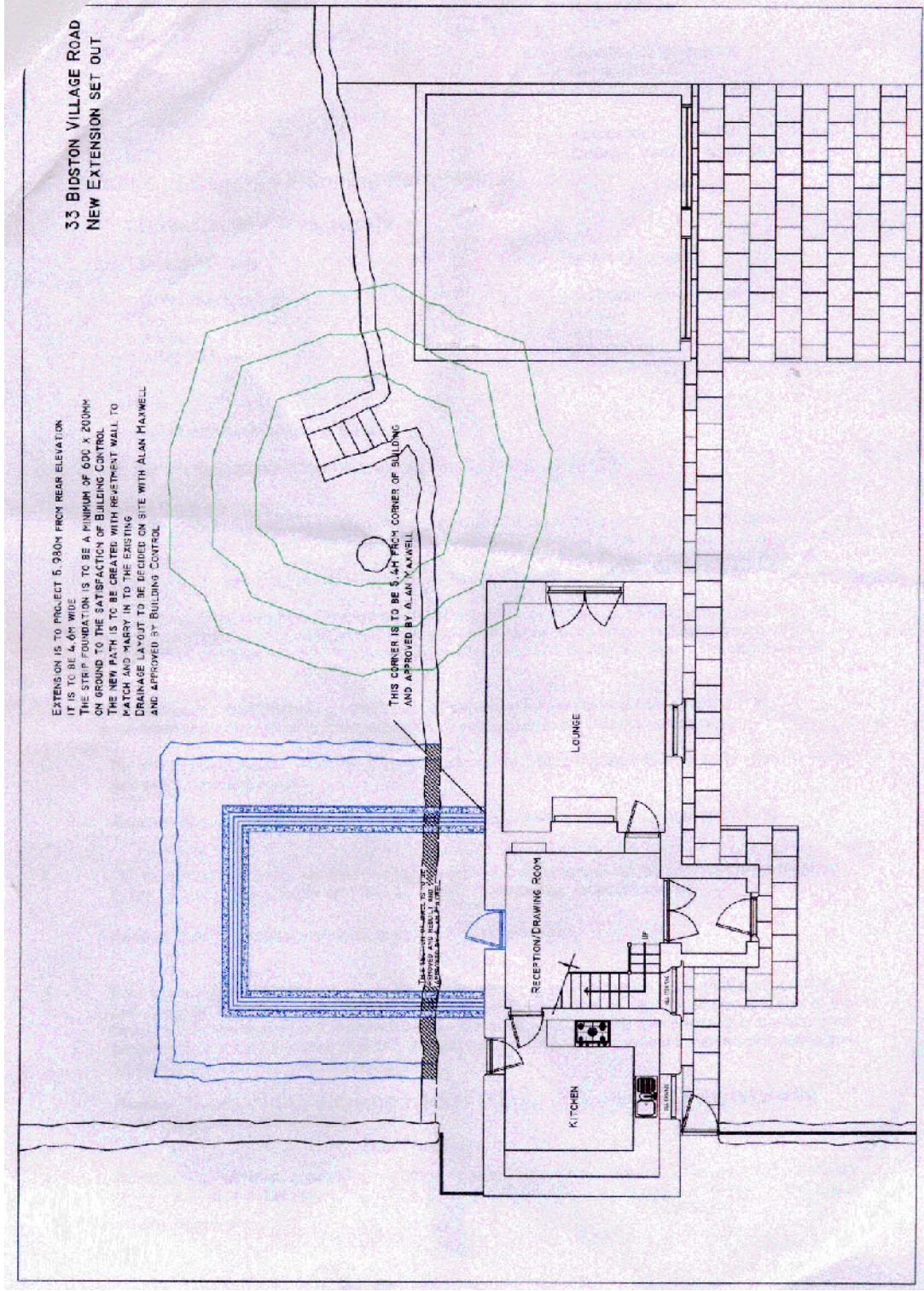


Fig. 2. Location of the extension (blue) in relation to current site layout. Not to scale, based on data from the client.

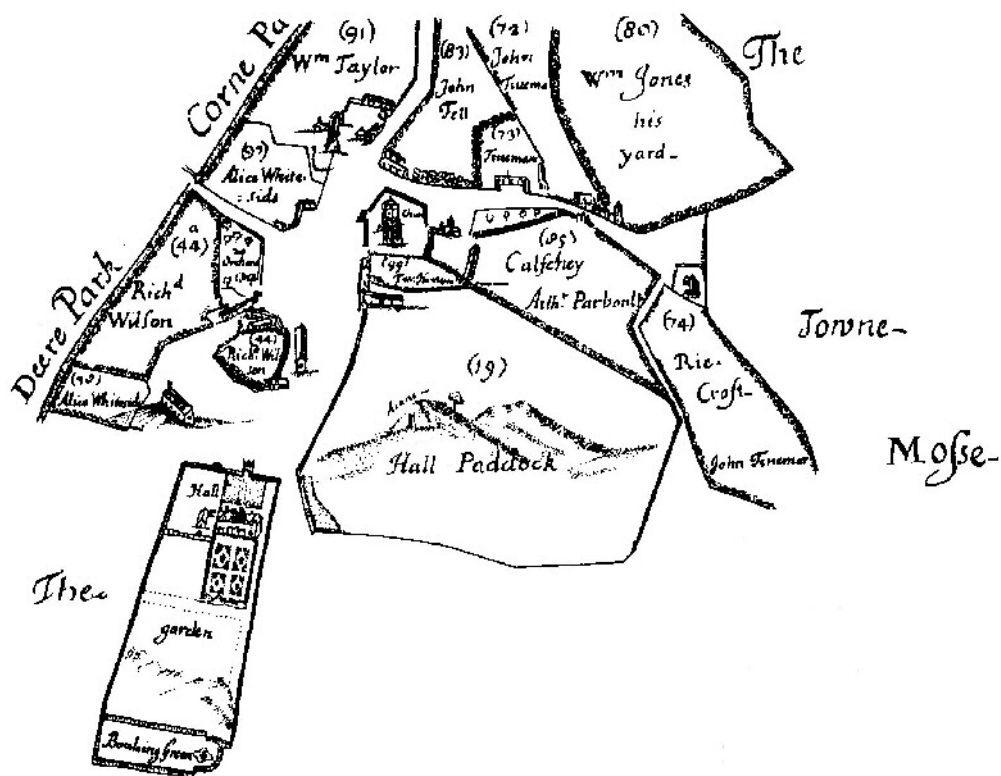


Fig. 3. Part of the 1665 Kingston Estate Survey of Bidston village. The present site lies at the left-hand side of Plot 19. North is to the right.



Fig. 4. Part of the Bidston Tithe Map of c. 1842 (Cheshire Record Office EDT 47/2/1). The present site lies at the western end of Plot 225.



Fig. 5. Part of the 1875 OS 1st Edn 25" Cheshire Sheet VII.14.

10. Plates



Plate 1. Site before excavation.



Plate 2. Rock cut features to the rear of the cottage. View looking north.



Plate 3. Excavated area after hand cleaning.



Plate 4. Oblique view generated in Autodesk 123D Capture.

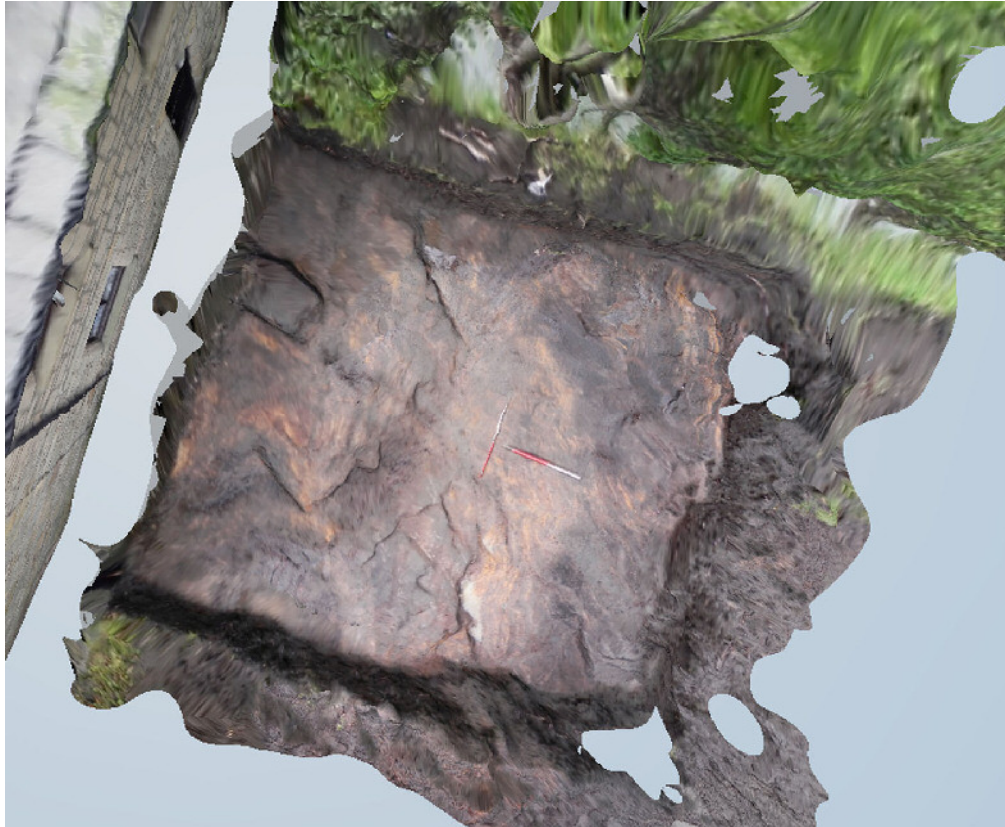


Plate 4. Plan view generated in Autodesk 123D Capture.



Plate 5. Detail of ranging rods in Plate 3 showing distortion.

11. Bibliography

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11. Archive Catalogue

The archive is retained and curated at National Museums Liverpool

11.1 Finds

No finds were retained

11.2 Photographic Catalogue

145 Bidston, 33 Biston Village Road, Photographic Register

CAT	FILM	AREA	DESCRIPTION	DIR	TAKEN BY	DATE
1	Digital	I	Pre-excavation view looking south showing cut features to rear of cottage		MA	03/08/2012
2	Digital	I	Pre-excavation view looking north showing cut features to rear of cottage		MA	03/08/2012
3	Digital	I	Pre-excavation view looking north showing cut features to rear of cottage		MA	03/08/2012
4	Digital	I	Pre-excavation view looking north showing cut features to rear of cottage		MA	03/08/2012
5	Digital	I	Pre-excavation view of garden looking north		MA	03/08/2012
6	Digital	I	Pre-excavation view of garden looking north-west		MA	03/08/2012
7	Digital	I	Working shot looking north		MA	03/08/2012
8	Digital	I	Working shot		MA	03/08/2012
9	Digital	I	Working shot		MA	03/08/2012
10	Digital	I	Working shot		MA	03/08/2012
11	Digital	I	Working shot		MA	03/08/2012
12	Digital	I	Working shot		MA	03/08/2012
13	Digital	I	Working shot		MA	03/08/2012
14	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking north		MA	03/08/2012
15	Digital	I	Rear wall of cottage, shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
16	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking north		MA	03/08/2012
17	Digital	I	Rear wall of cottage, shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
18	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking north-west		MA	03/08/2012
19	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking north-west		MA	03/08/2012
20	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking north-west		MA	03/08/2012
21	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking north-west		MA	03/08/2012
22	Digital	I	Rear wall of cottage, shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
23	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking west		MA	03/08/2012
24	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking west		MA	03/08/2012
25	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking west		MA	03/08/2012
26	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking west		MA	03/08/2012
27	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking west		MA	03/08/2012

CAT	FILM	AREA	DESCRIPTION	DIR	TAKEN BY	DATE
28	Digital	I	Rear wall of cottage, shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
29	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking south-west		MA	03/08/2012
30	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking south-west		MA	03/08/2012
31	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking south-west		MA	03/08/2012
32	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking south-west		MA	03/08/2012
33	Digital	I	Rear wall of cottage, shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
34	Digital	I	Rear wall of cottage, shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
35	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking north-east		MA	03/08/2012
36	Digital	I	Trench after cleaning looking north-east		MA	03/08/2012
37	Digital	I	Low angle oblique shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
38	Digital	I	Low angle oblique shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
39	Digital	I	Low angle oblique shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
40	Digital	I	Low angle oblique shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
41	Digital	I	Low angle oblique shot used in 123D Catch		MA	03/08/2012
42	Digital	I	Notebook record shot		MA	03/08/2012
43	Digital	I	Pre-excavation view of possible cut feature		MA	03/08/2012
44	Digital	I	Pre-excavation view of possible cut feature		MA	03/08/2012
45	Digital	I	Post-ex view of possible cut feature.		MA	03/08/2012

11.3 Context Listing

No context nos assigned