



Royal Grammar School
Upper Tything, Worcester.

Royal Grammar School

Upper Tything, Worcester. Archaeological
Recording; Phase 1 Ducting Excavation

NGR: SO 84760 55800

Site code: WRGS17a

WCM102245

OASIS ID: 110archa1-297081

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Front cover; View looking west showing trench 2

SUMMARY

Archaeological recording was carried out during September 2017 and April 2018 at Worcester Royal Grammar School, Worcester during the insertion of ducting across parts of the school grounds. The works represented the first of two phases of construction, the second phase was associated with an extension to the Godfrey Brown Theatre.

The Historic Environment Record (HER) showed the school to be situated on the site of the nunnery of the White Ladies of Aston. This was a Cistercian House dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, it was founded some time before 1255 and dissolved in 1536. All that remains of the Priory fabric are the end walls of the C13 chapel, these had been incorporated in the Tudor house which was built on the site.

Trenching for the new ducting was mainly focused an area which currently slopes down from the north side of the chapel in what is now garden between the school buildings. The earliest map (Doharty,1741) shows this area was associated with orchards. The results of these excavations showed that the depth of deposits across this part of the site is variable. Natural gravel was reached along the lower ground to the north, but not within the trenching to the south where there appear to be significant ground consolidation, probably related to a build-up of deposits associated with the of the demolition of the medieval chapel and the construction of the subsequent Tudor house. Major alterations were also undertaken when it was incorporated into the existing school building.

Some further trenching was undertaken to the south-east of the nunnery, also identified as orchard on the 1741 map. The most significant discovery in this area was a probable medieval masonry wall which corresponded with the alignment of a boundary also depicted on the 1741 map. The fabric of the wall consisted of a red sandstone similar with the chapels remains incorporated in the gable ends of the existing school building. The position of the wall within the proximity of the former nunnery suggests that it marked the eastern edge of the close area around the priory.



Fig. 1; site location (circled in red)



Fig. 2; area of study (outlined in red)

INTRODUCTION

Location and scope of works (Figs. 1 & 2)

This document sets out the results of archaeological recording (watching brief) during 11th July 2017 and 9th April 2018 at the Royal Grammar School, Upper Tything, Worcester, WR11HP. The work was carried out in accordance with a brief (Dinn, 2017) requested by the Worcester City Historic Environment Service as a condition of planning permission (planning Ref: P17A0216) which had been granted for the installation of new ducting across parts of the school. The work represented the first of two phases of excavation at the school and preceded another scheme which comprises the construction of a new theatre; the subject of a separate planning application and mitigation strategy (Cook, 2018b).

Worcester City Council considered that as the scheme may cause harm to or lead to the loss of significance of heritage assets of archaeological and/or historic interest. The RGS occupies the site of the medieval Whistones Nunnery, of which part of the chapel survives above ground. This is listed as attached to Whiteladies and Priory House, also be classified with 'non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest that are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments. Buried archaeological remains of the chapel and other conventual buildings, cemetery etc are known to exist on the site, though they have never been subject to any substantial archaeological investigation. Roman remains are also known from areas around the site. No formal archaeological fieldwork has been carried out on this part of the RGSW site. However, some watching brief/salvage recording was carried out in 1959 (Wheeler, 1990), when human burials and medieval floor tiles were found during groundworks for Hillard Hall (WCM100479).

Geology and topography

The site is located on the east side of Upper Tything, Worcester, about 1 km north of the historic city centre lying at approximately 21m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). It is currently occupied by a building, part of the Royal Grammar School complex, with adjacent hard-standings to either side. Preliminary investigations carried out during the compilation of the WSI showed that the underlying geology of the site comprises a Terrace deposit of the 2nd (Worcester) of the River Severn (BGS, 1993). This was confirmed during the earlier evaluation

(Cook, 2009) and again in places during excavation of the ducting trenches and the foundation trenches for the new extension to the existing Godfrey-Brown Theatre (Cook, 2018b).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A total of 102 monument records and 43 event records are identified from the Historic Environment Record (HER) within the 250m search area centred on the site. A summary of the significant information is outlined below.

Prehistoric

There is currently no evidence within the search area for prehistoric deposits. Possible Iron Age deposits have been recently recorded further north during excavation at the former Worcester Football Club (Bray, 2016).

Roman

[WSM07300](#); Romano-British coins, White Ladies, Upper Tything, Worcester.

WCM 101137; an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Alice Ottley School revealing the remnants of a possible Roman soil horizon as well as layers of dumped material cut by two pits dating to the post-medieval period. The results showed that the area had perhaps always been used for agricultural and as gardens (Goad and Darch, 2003).

Saxon/early medieval

[WCM96061](#); a stone cross, 'of Saxon origin, and probably sepulchral' 'called the White Stane' once stood somewhere on the site of the Priory of Whistones (WCM 96059) and gave its name to the manor of Whistones. May possibly have been a medieval (?12th-century) cross that stood in the vicinity to mark the end of the bishops' planned suburb.

Medieval

[WCM96059](#); Whistones Priory medieval Cistercian nunnery, was in existence by 1240-1 when Henry III sent gifts to the White Sisters of Worcester. This suggests that the foundation may have pre-dated the election of Bishop Walter de Cantilupe in 1237, traditionally regarded as the founder.

No archaeological fieldwork is known to have taken place within the proposed building footprint. The proposed development is within an area that

historically formed part of the Priory of Whistones, a house of Cistercian nuns. The nunnery of the White Ladies of Aston, otherwise known as the house of St. Mary Magdalene, at Whistones, stood on the north side of the cemetery of the hospital of St. Oswald. It was founded before 1255, in which year the site was confirmed to the nuns by the prior and convent of Worcester (VCH, 1971).

[WCM100481](#); Mention by Edwin Lees of the exhumation 'many times' of skeletons from the nunnery cemetery on the north side of Whiteladies House. Specifically, 'three skeletons were uncovered (Lees, 1867).

[WCM96060](#); Nunnery chapel, White Ladies (Whistones). Medieval nunnery chapel, part of the Priory of Whistones (WCM 96059). The architectural details of the remains of the chapel are consistent with the documentary evidence indicating a date of 1255 for its foundation.

[WCM96012](#); St Oswald's Hospital. Medieval hospital and post-medieval alms houses. The earliest reference to St Oswald's, in the Mappa Mundi dating from c 1200. Although traditionally founded by St Oswald himself, it is most likely to have been a typical suburban hospital founded in the 12th century.

[WCM100612](#); demonstrates the presence of burials in the north-east corner of the site. In 1930 the cemetery was said to have been much larger in former years than it was then.

[WCM96065](#); Whistones Tithe Barn. Medieval or post-medieval tithe barn of Claines parish, demolished in 1878 when the present almshouses were built. It stood on and along the street frontage according to Young's 1770 and Doharty's 1741 map.

[WCM96068](#); St Oswald's Hospital, medieval ranges
Evaluation and a small-scale excavation in the early 1990s (WCM 100390, 100391) on the south side of the present St Oswald's Hospital precinct (WCM 96012) showed that the medieval ranges were aligned differently to the present (1871-3) ranges, and the preceding ranges as mapped in the 18th century (WCM 96062, 96063). A substantial late medieval masonry building was found, aligned NNW - SSE, with a clay floor beneath a robbed tile floor.

[WCM96574](#); Whistones Priory: cemetery north of chapel?

[WCM96575](#); Whistones Priory: medieval fishpond

[WCM100479](#); During building work on WRGS in 1959 six skeletons were found when the old Preparatory School classroom was demolished. A Coroner's Inquest determined that they were burials from the nunnery cemetery. Excavations were undertaken by Henry Sandon, who found 'squares of fifteenth century wall tiles' 'associated' with the burials. It was determined from this that the burials had been re-interred as found, at a date not earlier than the 15th century. The bones were re-interred nearby under the SE corner of Hillard Hall (Wheeler, 1990).

[WCM101056](#); an archaeological evaluation at the rear of 35 The Tything, Worcester.

The earliest deposits exposed proved to consist of a sequence of stratified fills of a large feature of Roman or Medieval date (Napthan, 2003).

[WCM101424](#); archaeological evaluation on land to the rear of 27 The Tything.

The results demonstrated that there was activity on the site from at least the 13th century, although a ditch feature identified on the western side of the site, running north to south parallel with The Tything, is likely to be the western boundary ditch of the medieval Foregate Street suburb of Worcester, which was probably laid out in the 12th Century. There were no finds from the ditch, but previous work at 35 and 39 The Tything, further to the south, had identified a ditch feature on the same alignment, which contained pottery dating from the 14th century, indicating that by this time the ditch was not being maintained and that it is likely the feature had become redundant as a boundary marker (Williams, 2006).

Post-medieval

[WCM98012](#); Goulding's Hospital

[WCM99018](#); Whiteladies House at Worcester Royal Grammar School. c1720 with later additions and alterations; also, incorporates the remains of the C13 chapel of the Cistercian Nunnery of Whiteladies which formerly occupied the site.

[WCM99930](#); several human skeletons were found, probably the remains of persons killed at the Battle of Worcester, in 1651.

[WCM101213](#); archaeological evaluation at Alice Ottley School, Upper Tything.

No features, horizons or structures pre-dating the post-medieval period were identified within the two evaluation trenches. A single residual Roman sherd and a medieval roof-tile were recovered in association with post-medieval and modern material. Dump deposits containing building debris lay directly over the natural matrix of river terrace sand and gravel, indicating that earlier horizons had been scoured off prior to their deposition, probably associated with construction and development of the site from the mid-18th century. An east, north east/west, south west ditch was recorded, on the south-east side of the site and may represent the southern boundary of the medieval White Ladies Priory which lay to the north. (Vaughan, Crawford and Pearson, 2004).

[WCM101251](#); archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the rear of 31 The Tything.

The earliest deposits proved to consist of a greenish grey sandy loam layer, possibly a cultivated soil containing moderately frequent fragments of 13th - 15th century pottery and occasional residual Roman material. The bulk of the excavated deposits however consisted of the fills of one large, apparently linear feature of early post medieval date (Napthan, 2004).

[WCM101765](#); archaeological evaluation at Royal Grammar School Worcester, Upper Tything.

The evaluation in 2009 recorded in both trenches cultivated soil producing a few fragments of medieval pottery overlain by a sequence of alternating post-medieval layers which were in turn overlain by a sandstone wall representing a former boundary to the south side of a road aligned east to west along the north side of the former White Ladies Nunnery (Cook, 2017).

[WCM96012](#); St Oswald's Hospital

Medieval hospital and post-medieval alms houses. The earliest reference to St Oswald's, in the Mappa Mundi compiled by Gervase of Canterbury, dates from c 1200; the next reference is not until 1264 when the hospital sought and received a grant of the king's protection. Although traditionally founded by St Oswald himself, it is most likely to have been a typical suburban hospital founded in the C12.

Undated

[WCM100391](#); St Oswald's Hospital - watching brief

Salvage recording was undertaken during the groundworks phase of the alms-house extension that had previously been evaluated (WCM 100390). Natural sand was found as per the evaluation at 21.29m AOD. Quantities of human bone were recovered from the trenches and machining disturbed several articulated burials (partially recorded). Bone was collected for reburial within the groundworks. The sandstone ashlar wall foundation seen in the evaluation was encountered again, in association with other walls forming the north, south and east sides of a rectangular structure. Three reused architectural fragments had been incorporated in the walls, one of Norman or Saxo-Norman date. Further decorated floor tiles and glazed roof tiles were found unstratified but may have been associated with this building (Edwards, 1992).

RESULTS (Figs. 3-8)

Method and nature of the excavation

The objective of the archaeological recording was to obtain an appropriate record of any archaeological deposits or finds disturbed or exposed during excavation of the ducting trenches at various locations across the school grounds. The trenches were allocated numbers from 1-5 and 7 (the foundation for the Godfrey Brown Theatre extension was trench 6) and sequences of context numbers were attributed to each trench by their individual numbers. Trenches 1-5 were excavated in phases at a consistent width of 0.45m and depth of 0.50 m using a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision. Trench 7 was excavated to a width of 0.60m and a depth of 0.90m. Excavation began at the south end although the first 10m of trenching (including wall 703) was not observed, instead recording of the open trench was made prior to the continuing excavation of the remaining length of trenching leading up to the theatre extension.

Description of deposits (Trenches 1-5 & 7)

TRENCHES 1-5 & 7

The earliest deposit recorded during the excavations was the natural substrate (contexts 203 & 702) consisting of an orange sandy-gravel interpreted as a Terrace gravel of the River Severn. The surface of this deposit was exposed in trench 2 at a level height of approx. 20.48m AOD and in trench 7 at about 20.50m AOD. In both trenches it was truncated during the excavations to a depth

of about 0.10m. the gravel was recorded only in the east-west arm of trench 2 where its surface rises gently towards the centre of the trench before sloping down again towards the west end. Here the disturbed stratigraphy suggests some truncation associated with the overlying relict subsoil layer (204).

In trenches 2 and 7 the natural gravel was sealed by a relict subsoil layer (contexts 204 & 701). In trench 2 this was a consistent depth of about 0.15-20m, whilst in trench 7 the depth varied considerably from 0.15-0.40m. In both locations it comprised a mid-yellowish-brown, sandy-silt with some charcoal flecking and component of small to medium sized rounded pebbles throughout the deposit. Residual finds from layer 204 consisted of the occasional fragment of red brick, modern roof tile and a piece of clay pipe stem whilst layer 701 produced the occasional fragment of red brick. At the west end of trench 2 where the surface of the natural gravel begins to slope downwards there is evidence of a disturbed stratigraphy with some truncation of the gravel, but excavation was generally limited to a depth of no more than 0.60m and a width of about 0.50m, and the nature of the deposits within this part of the trench could not be fully resolved. Here the gravel is overlain by 201 which is in turn sealed by the deposit 202. Both contexts are similar in composition with the layer 204, albeit slightly darker in colour and appear to represent some form of re-deposition. A possible sloping edge between 202 and 204 seems to indicate a point of ground consolidation.

Natural gravel was not reached in trenches 1 and 3-5, instead the earliest deposits were the layers 102, 103, 301, 401 and 500. Contexts 102, 103 and 401 comprise a mid-yellowish-brown, sandy-silt with a component of small rounded pebbles and some charcoal flecking throughout, and although unclear, appear equivalent with the relict subsoil deposits 204 & 701. Layers 301 and 500, each consisting of a mid-dark-yellowish-brown, sandy-silt with a similar pebble component are sealed directly by layers of existing (modern) gravel and tarmac surfacing, suggesting that they are equivalent with the later deposits 100, 300, 400 & 500 interpreted as recent ground consolidation. Finds of fragments of metal, red brick and concrete fragments confirmed the modern nature of these layers. A series of modern pits, structures and service trenches are associated with these more recent deposits.

In both trenches 2 and 7 the subsoil was sealed by the modern topsoil, in trench 2 this deposit (200) was associated with the existing lawn area and was generally about 0.20m thick. In trench 7 the equivalent layer (700) comprising a dark-greyish-brown, sandy-silt, varying in thickness from 0.20m-0.40m was sealed by an existing layer of modern tarmac and gravel sub-base.

A single masonry wall (703) was recorded aligned north-west to south-east across trench 7 (See plates 21-23). The wall had been subjected to earlier truncation during the construction of a large overlying linear concrete feature. Excavation of the ducting trench went beneath this concrete feature cutting across part of the wall which showed it was 0.60m wide. As a result of the truncation it survived to a maximum depth of 0.42m in the south face of the trench section. It was built using seemingly roughly squared blocks of a local sandstone about 0.30m wide and 0.25m deep. Two courses of the wall fabric survive on the south side of the trench whilst in the opposite trench section only a single course of walling survived the truncation. There was no rubble core to the fabric of the wall, instead the blocks of stone appeared overlapping slightly, and butting neatly against one another. No clear mortar could be observed within the wall, instead thin lenses of light brown silty-clay between stones suggest a sort of rudimentary bonding agent. The wall appears to have been constructed within the relict subsoil layer 701 which presumably formed the contemporary (medieval?) ground level, but no obvious construction trench was visible. The base of the wall appeared to sit on the surface of the natural gravel indicating that the surviving fabric probably represents the foundation remains, although no characteristic offset or chamfer along the base of the wall was observed that might suggest that this was in any different from the fabric of the wall that formerly stood above ground level.

FINDS

Finds recovered during the excavation from the subsoil layers comprised several residually deposited fragments of C19 roof tile, red brick and a single fragment of clay pipe stem identified by the excavator as probably of equivalent date. These finds were not retained.

Environmental data

None of the deposits exposed during the excavation proved suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling.

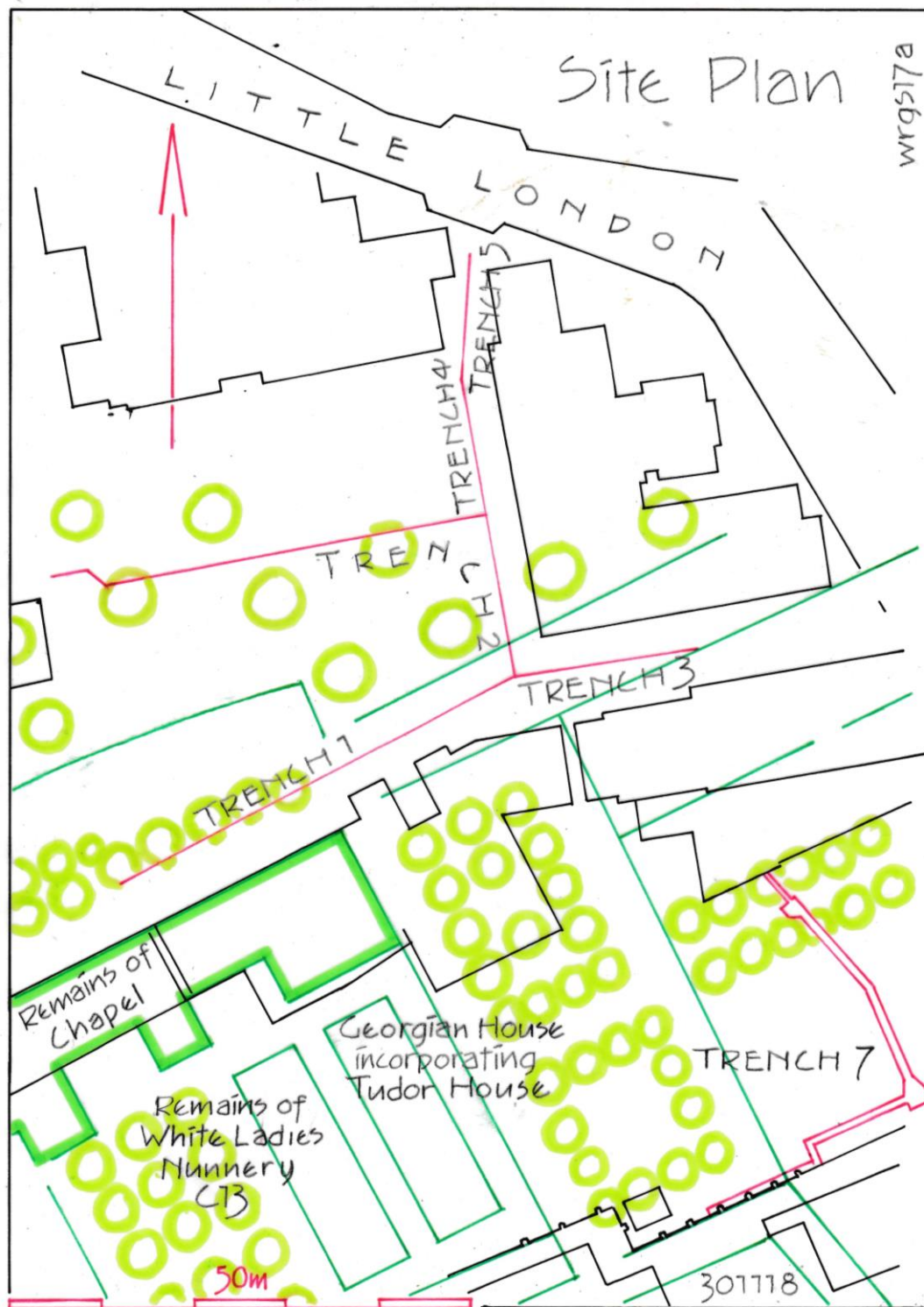


Fig. 3; site plan showing best fit features (dark green) from Doharty's 1741 map of Worcester. Trees (light green). Location of trenches 1-7 (red).

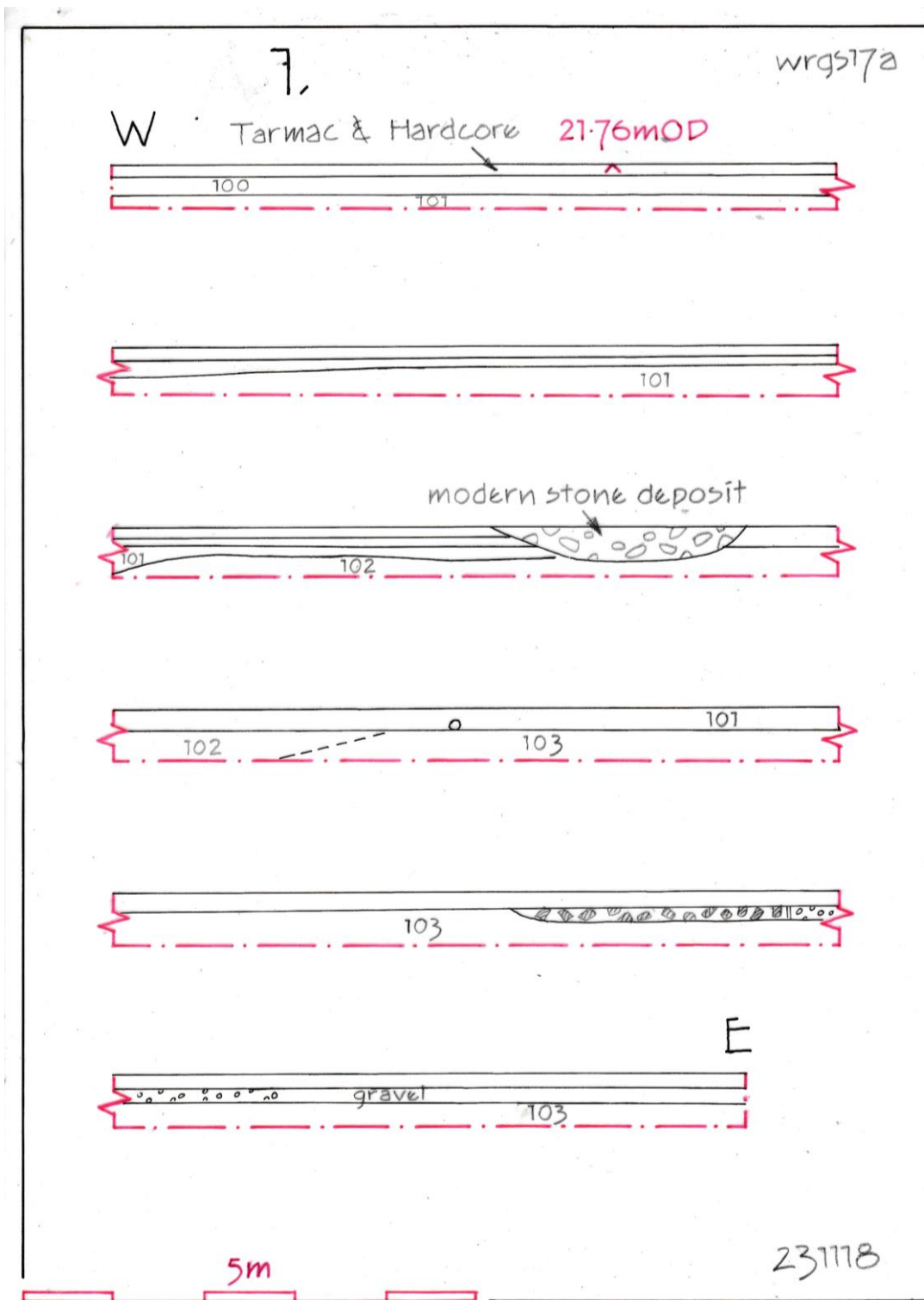


Fig.4; trench 1, section

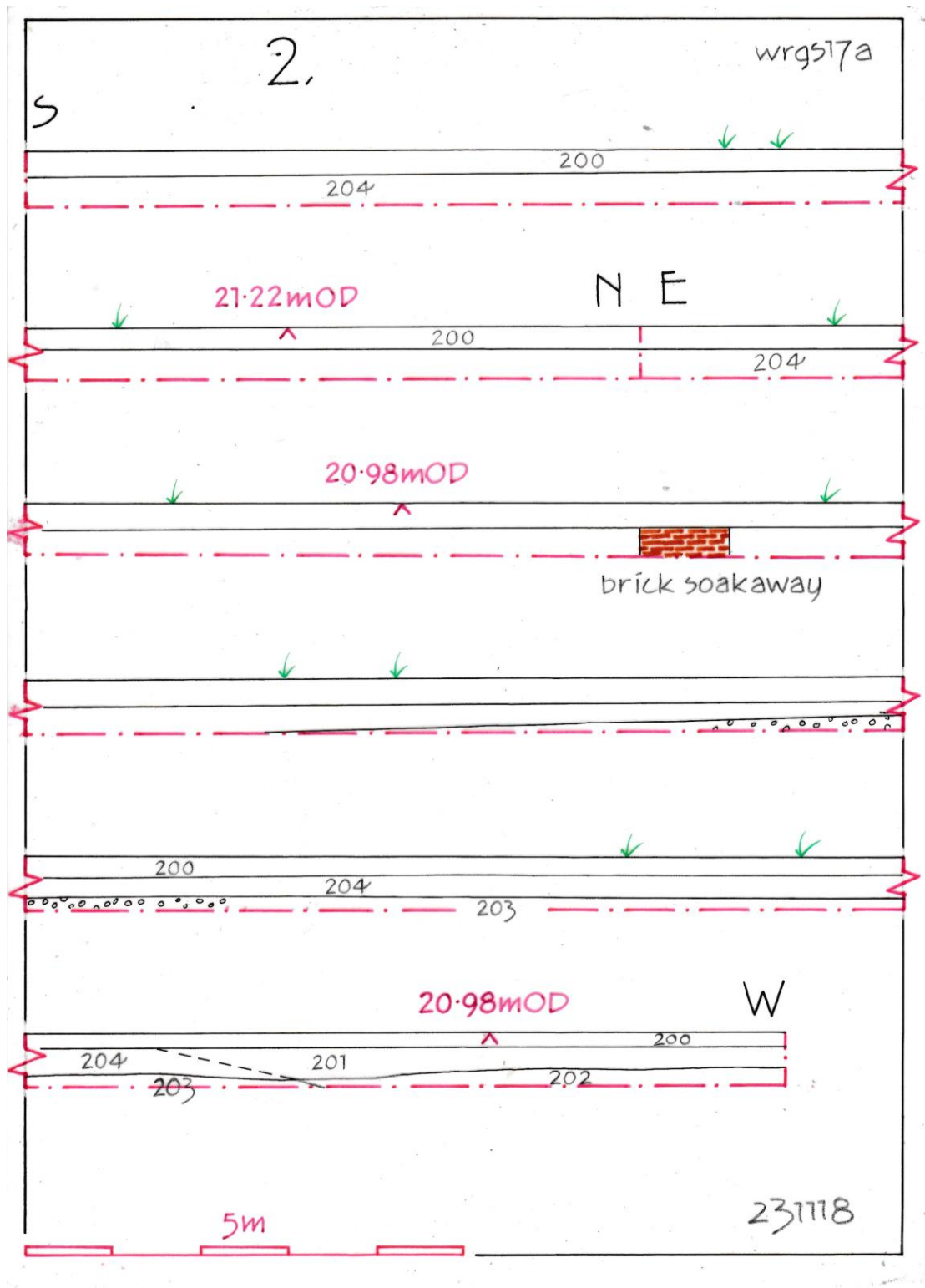


Fig. 5; trench 2, section

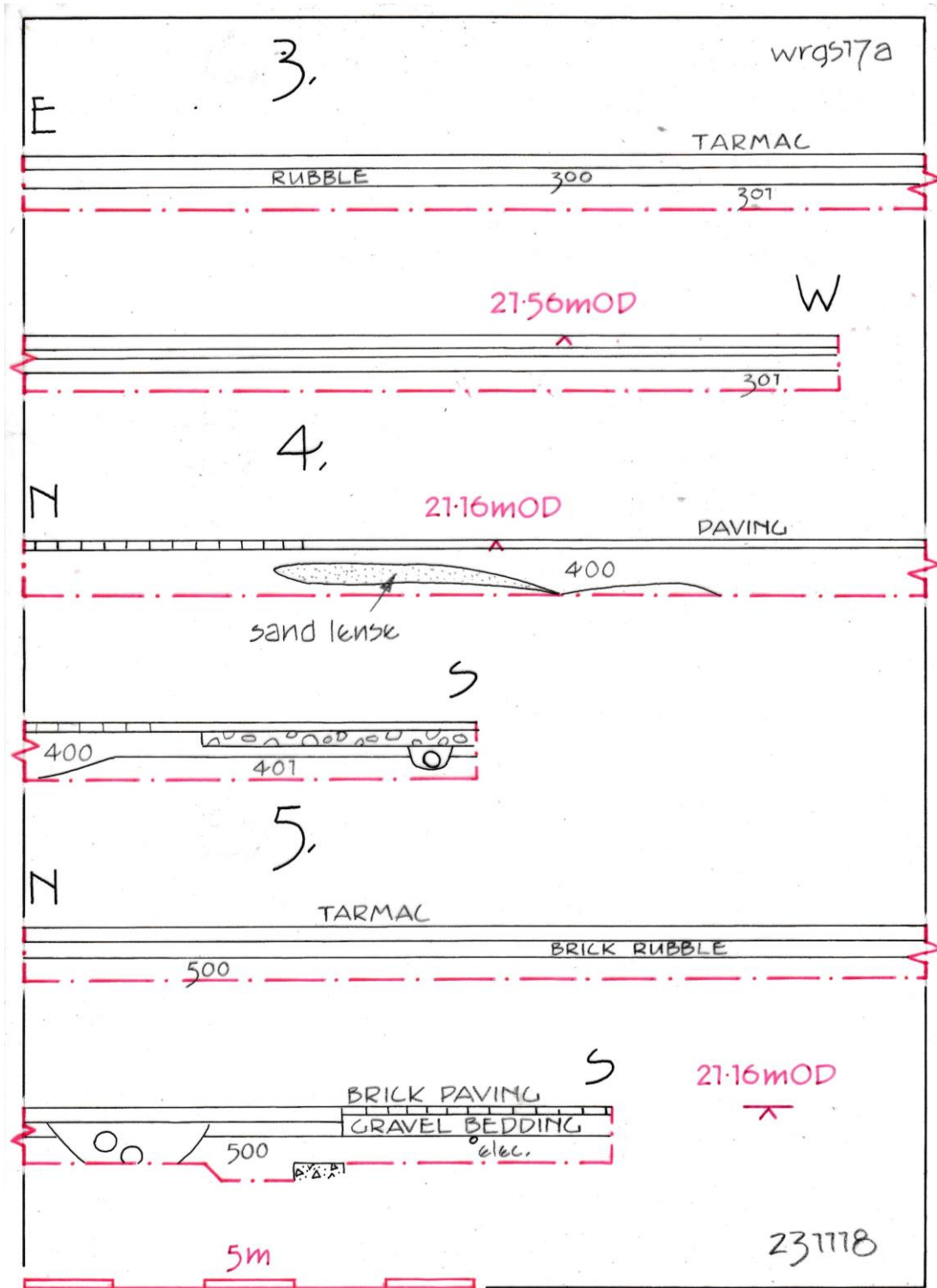


Fig. 6; trenches 3, 4 & 5, sections

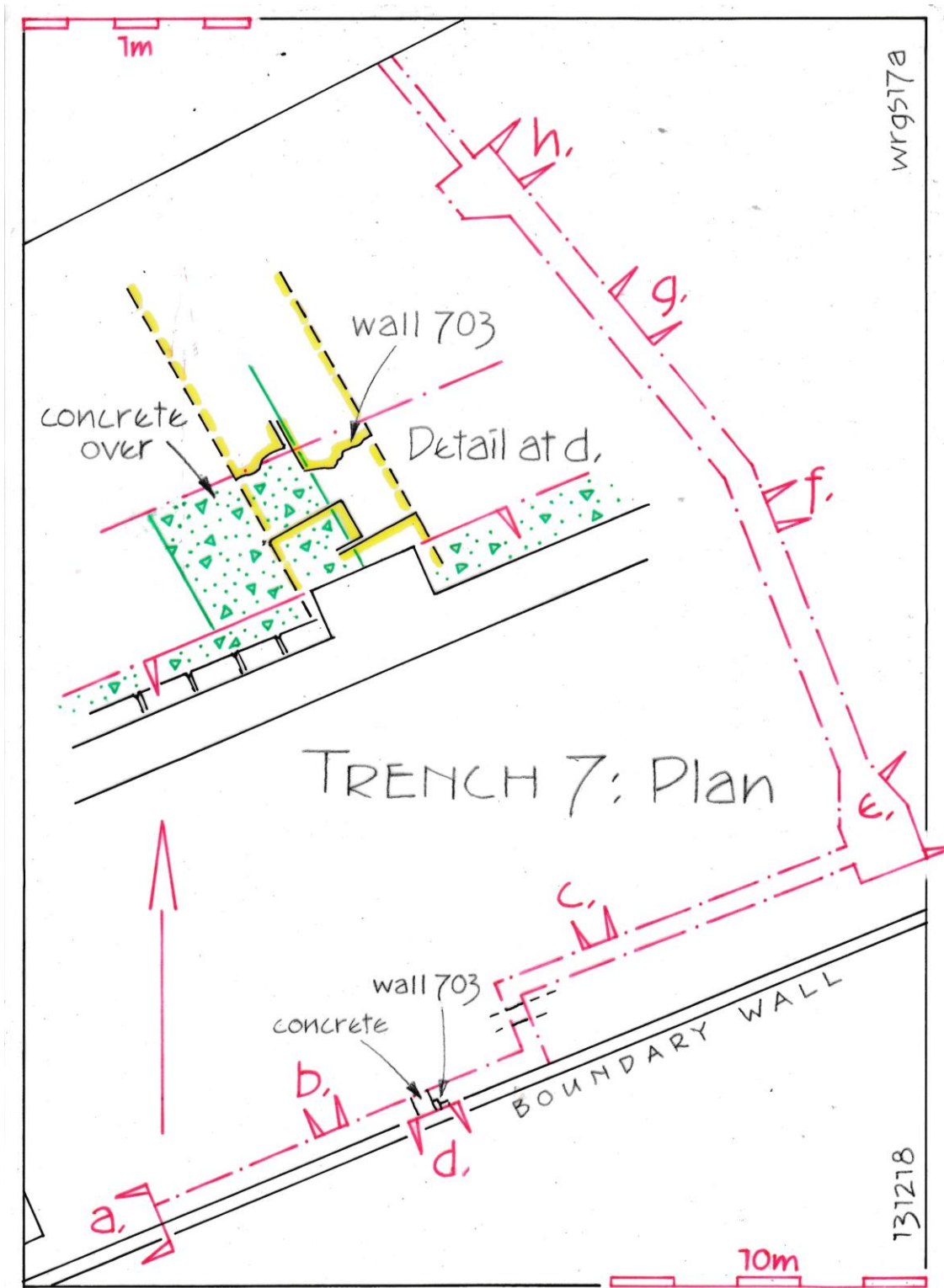


Fig. 7; plan of trench 7 showing section locations with detailed plan (inset) of wall 703.

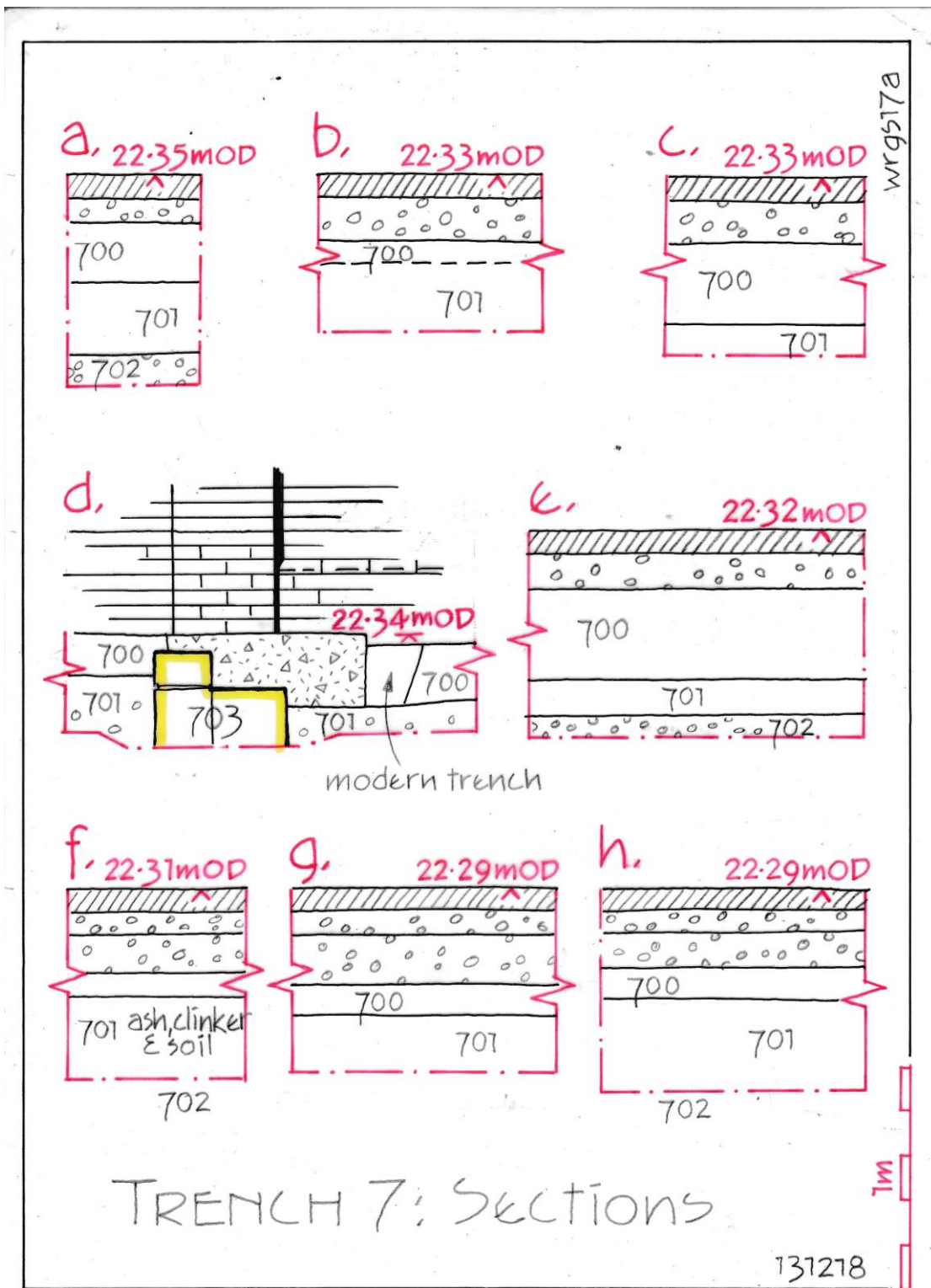


Fig. 8; trench 7, sections

DISCUSSION

The Historic Environment Record (HER) shows the school to be situated on the site of the nunnery of the White Ladies of Aston. This was a Cistercian House dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, it was founded some time before 1255 and dissolved in 1536. All that remains of the Priory fabric are the end walls of the C13 chapel, these had been incorporated in the Tudor house which was built on the site.

Doharty's map of 1741 is the earliest cartographic source and provides the layout of the pre-school landscape associated with the priory and the subsequent Tudor mansion. This shows that the trenching for the new ducting was mainly focused in areas which functioned as orchards and cultivated plots within boundaries marking the closed areas. The majority of excavation was in an area to the north of the former priory (trenches 1-5) where the ground currently slopes down from the north side of the chapel in what is now garden between the school buildings. The stratigraphy within trench 2 revealed the natural gravel at only about 0.40m below ground existing level whilst in trench 1 on the higher south side of the site this was not reached indicating ground consolidation. This is probably related to a build-up of deposits associated with the demolition of the Tudor house and the construction of the subsequent school building.

Further excavation (trench 7) was undertaken to the south-east of the former nunnery where a masonry wall was recorded which corresponded with the alignment of a boundary also depicted on the 1741 map. The fabric of the wall consisted of a red sandstone similar with the chapels remains incorporated in the gable ends of the existing school building suggesting that it is of medieval date. The position of the wall within the proximity of the former nunnery suggests that it marked the eastern edge of the close area around the priory.

In the areas where trenching revealed the full stratigraphic sequence of deposits above the natural gravel it was clear that this gravel was sealed by a homogenous layer of relict subsoil-the large component of pebbles within this deposit suggests periods of prolonged cultivation resulting in the mixing of the underlying gravel with the earlier ground level. Apart from the masonry wall in trench 7 there was no evidence in the form of cut features or deposits that could indicate earlier activity within the areas of excavation and the lack of finds supports this conclusion.

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Archive Location

A digital (pdf) copy of the report (referenced with OASIS) will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service. The documentary archive will be deposited with the Worcester Museum Service.



Plate 1; Trench 1 from west



Plate 2; Trench 1 from east



Plate 3; Trench 1, Section at west end



Plate 4; Trench 1, detail of section at mid-way point along the trench



Plate 5; Trench 2 from east



Plate 6; Trench 2, section at west end



Plate 7; Trench 2, section at 7m



Plate 8; Trench 2, section



Plate 9; Trench 2, gravel



Plate 10; Trench 2, section at 48m



Plate 11; Trench 3 from east



Plate 12; Trench 3, section at 3m



Plate 13; Trench 3, section at 10m



Plate 14; Trench 3, section at 19m



Plate 15; Trench 4 from north



Plate 16; Trench 4, section



Plate 17; Trench 5 from north



Plate 18; Trench 5, section



Plate 19; stratigraphy at west end of trench 7 (layers 700, 701 & 702)



Plate 20; overall view to the west of the E-W arm of trench 7 showing location of wall 703



Plate 21; wall 703, view to the south-west (section 7d)



Plate 22; wall 703



Plate 23; wall 703 in the opposite south facing section where truncation is greater

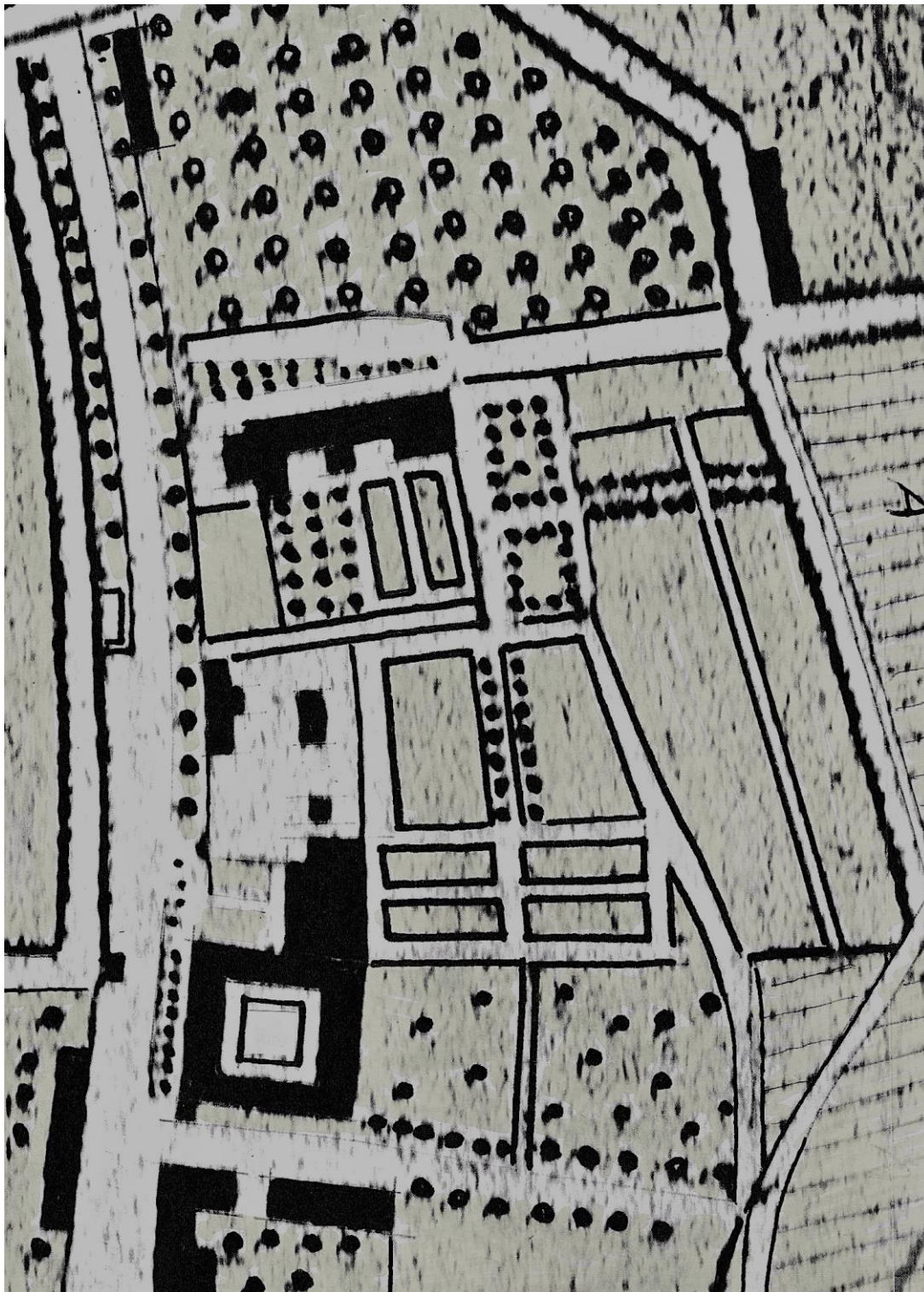


Plate 24; section 7c



Plate 25; section 7e

APPENDIX 1: extract from Doharty's 1741cv map of Worcester centred on the RGS



APPENDIX 2: OASIS

Project details

Project name	Royal Grammar School, Upper Tything, Worcester. Phase 1; ducting excavation
Project dates	Start: 11-07-2017 End: 09-04-2018
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	WRGS17a - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	WCM102245 - HER event no.
Type of project	Recording project
Current Land use	Other 14 - Recreational usage
Monument type	WALL Medieval
Significant Finds	BRICK Modern
Significant Finds	TILE Modern
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	Planning condition

Project location

Country	England
Site location	WORCESTERSHIRE WORCESTER WARNDON Royal Grammar School
Postcode	WR11HP
Study area	0 Square metres
Site coordinates	SO 84760 55800 52.199818552201 -2.22300964938 52 11 59 N 002 13 22 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 20.48m Max: 20.5m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	one ten archaeology
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	one ten archaeology
Project director/manager	sean cook
Project supervisor	sean cook

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	OASIS

Paper Archive recipient county museum
Paper Media available "Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes","Plan","Report","Section"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title Royal Grammar School Upper Tything, Worcester. Archaeological Recording; Phase 1
Author(s)/Editor(s) Cook, S
Date 2018
Issuer or publisher one ten archaeology
Place of issue or publication Warwickshire
URL <http://www.oasis.ac.uk>
Entered by sean cook (sean@onetenarchaeology.co.uk)
Entered on 3 December 2018