



Royal Grammar School

Upper Tything, Worcester

Royal Grammar School

Upper Tything, Worcester. Archaeological Recording;
Phase 2 Godfrey Brown Theatre Excavation

NGR: SO 84760 55800

Site code: WRGS17b

WCM102244

OASIS ID: 110archa1-297084

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Front cover; view of excavations from south-east

SUMMARY

Archaeological recording was carried out in September 2017 at the Royal Grammar School, Worcester, during the erection of a theatre and performing arts centre extension. The works represented the second of two phases of construction, the first phase was associated with the insertion of ducting across parts of the school site.

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.

The earliest map (Doharty. 1741) shows the layout of the pre-school landscape associated with the priory and the subsequent Tudor mansion. This shows that the Godfrey Brown Theatre and the new extension lie in an area to the east of the nunnery which functioned as orchards and cultivated plots within former boundaries marking the closed areas. This is supported by the results of the excavation which showed a stratigraphy characteristic of an open rural landscape with the evidence indicating periods of prolonged cultivation and manuring.



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 31st August 2017 and 9th October 2018 at the Royal Grammar School Worcester, Upper Tything, Worcester, WR1 1HP. 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 has been granted for refurbishment and extension of the Godfrey Brown Theatre. This work represented the second of two phases of excavation at the school and precedes another scheme which comprised the installation of new ducting across parts of the school; the subject of a separate planning application and report (Cook, 2018a).

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).

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on the site during 2009 (Cook, 2017) in the area of the existing theatre in connection with an earlier with an earlier proposal to develop the site. This revealed a wall in one of the trenches corresponding with a boundary mapped in 1741, whilst the results from the second trench suggested the area was open ground, probably used as orchard and/or cultivated ground.

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. The proposed new extension (approx. 350m²) lies adjacent to the south side of the existing theatre. The underlying geology of the site comprises Second Terrace gravel (Worcester) of the River Severn (BGS, 1993). This was confirmed during the excavations.

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).

Evidence of Roman activity is recorded within the vicinity of the site in Britannia Square and Landsdowne Road. In 2014 excavation at the former Worcester City Football Club revealed a dense cluster of multi-period archaeological deposits from (probably) the Iron Age, Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods (Bray, 2016).

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. The function of the building is not known. Earlier (Romanesque to mid-13th-C) architectural material was recovered from the fabric of the walls.

[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 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, 2009).

[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 12th century.

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. 3-5)

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 foundation trench (trench 6) for the Godfrey Brown Theatre extension. Other trenching (1-7 & 7) being carried out concurrently during the theatre excavations included the ducting excavation which was at various locations across the school grounds. Trench 6 was continuous and excavated at a consistent width of 0.60m and depth of about 0.90 m using a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision. Excavation of the attenuation tank trench was undertaken in August

2018 without archaeological monitoring and recording. Based on the results of the adjacent excavation of the foundation trench it was considered unlikely that archaeological deposits were impacted on.

Description of deposits

TRENCH 6

The earliest deposit recorded throughout most of the length of the trench during the excavations was the natural substrate (context 603) consisting of an orange sandy-gravel associated with the Terraces of the River Severn. This was situated at a height of about 20.50 to 20.60m AOD. The same gravel deposit was also recorded during the ducting excavations (in trenches 2 and 7). This gravel was sealed throughout the trench by sequence of homogenous layers of varying thicknesses. The earliest of these was an undated relict subsoil deposit (602) consisting of a yellowish-brown, sandy-silt with a gravel component and varying in depth from 0.10-0.45m. This deposit was in turn overlain by a layer (601) throughout the trench comprising a mid-greyish-brown, sandy-silty also with a gravel component. Finds consisted of the occasional fragment of red brick. The depth of this deposit varied from 0.30m-0.45m. A thin layer of dark greyish-brown, clayey-silt (600) up to 0.25m thick and with a pebble component represented the upper soil layer. This was sealed by the existing ground consisting of stone chippings capped by tarmac.

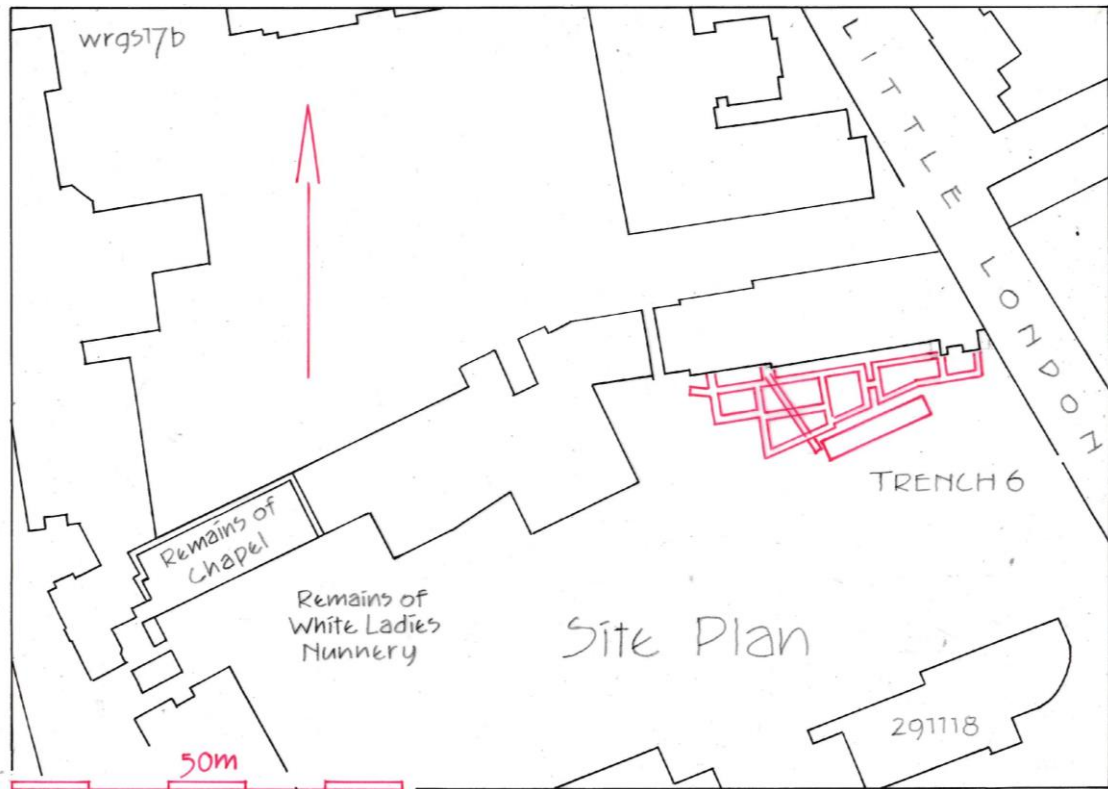


Fig. 3; site plan showing location of trench 6

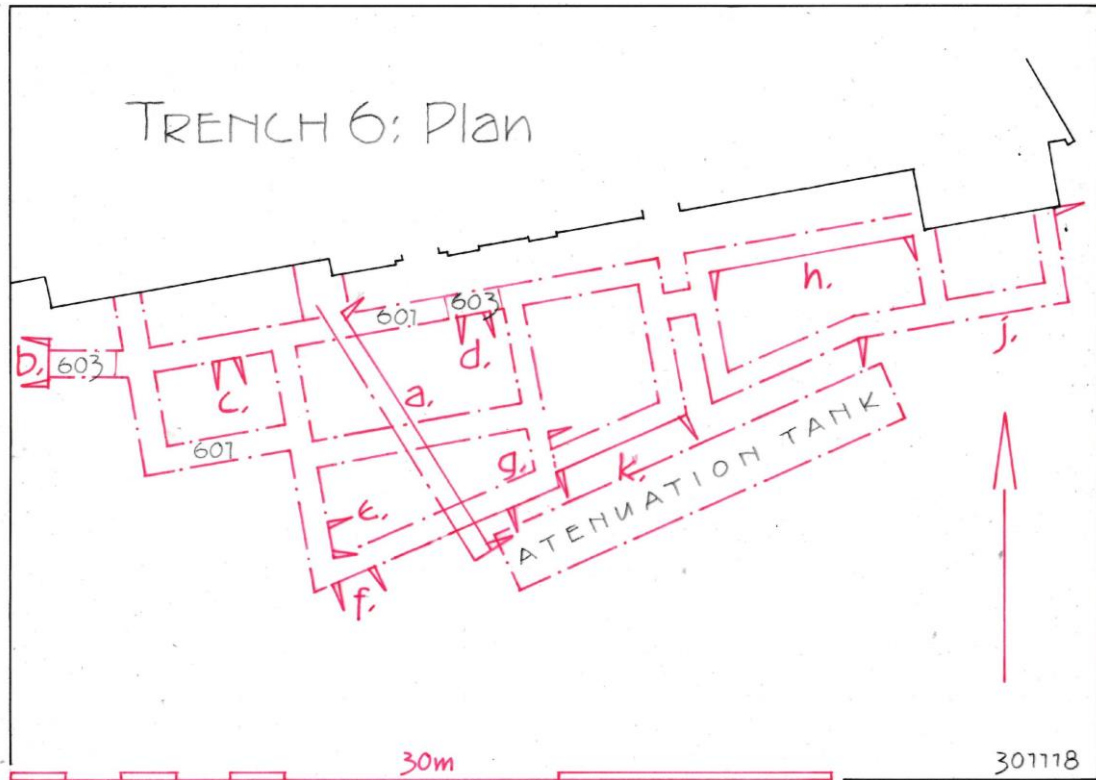


Fig.4; Trench 6, plan

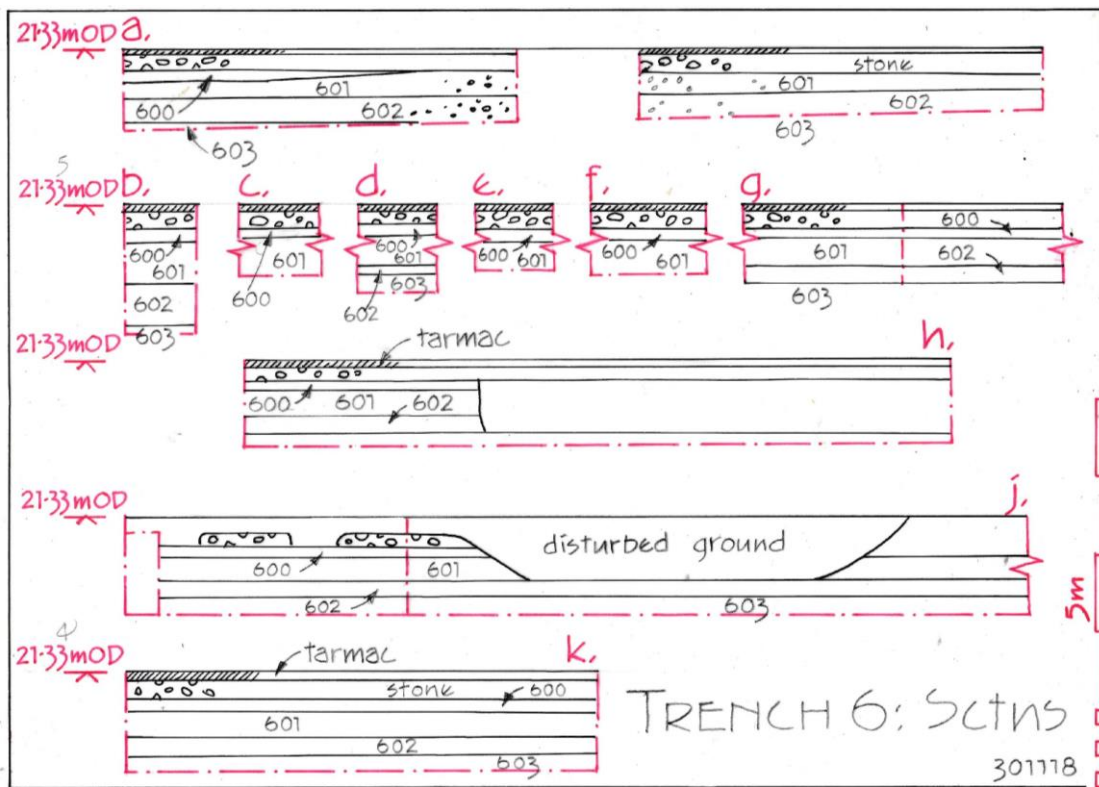


Fig. 5; Trench 6, sections

FINDS

Finds recovered during the excavation comprised the occasional fragment of red brick. These were not retained.

Environmental data

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

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 Worcester (1741) is the earliest cartographic source and provides the layout of the pre-school landscape associated with the priory and the subsequent Tudor mansion. The Godfrey Brown Theatre and the new extension lie in an area to the east of the nunnery which functioned as orchards and cultivated plots within former boundaries marking the closed areas. One of these boundaries situated to the north of the theatre was recorded as a masonry wall constructed from limestone during an evaluation in 2009 connected with an earlier proposal to develop the site. Excavation connected with the ducting installation to the south of the theatre in 2017 also recorded a masonry wall (Cook, 2018b) which again corresponded with the alignment of a boundary 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 the boundary is medieval.

The theatre excavation comprised a continuous strip foundation trench (trench 6) in areas identified in 1741 as garden/orchard areas to the east of this boundary. This was supported by the results of the excavations where the stratigraphic sequence of deposits was characteristic of an open rural landscape. The evidence indicates periods of prolonged cultivation and manuring. The natural gravel was sealed by thick homogenous layers of relict subsoil (602 & 601) and the

large component of pebbles within these deposits is indicative of cultivation resulting in the mixing of the underlying gravel with the earlier ground level. Excavation in this area also showed that the deposits were noticeably deeper lying at approx. 0.70-80m below ground level suggesting some ground consolidation. There no evidence in the form of cut features or deposits that could indicate earlier activity within the area of the theatre 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;



Plate 2; View of excavations from west



Plate 3; view of excavations from east



Plate 4; Section 6a



Plate 5; Section 6b



Plate 6; Section 6c



Plate 7; Section 6d



Plate 8; Section 6e



Plate 9; Section 6f



Plate10; Section 6g

APPENDIX 1: OASIS

Project details

Project name	Royal Grammar School Worcester Upper Tything, Worcester. Archaeological Recording; Phase 2
Project dates	Start: 31-08-2017 End: 09-10-2018
Previous/future work	Yes / No
Any associated project reference codes	WCM102244 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	WRGS17b - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 14 - Recreational usage
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	Planning condition

Project location

Country	England
Site location	WORCESTERSHIRE WORCESTER WORCESTER Royal Grammar School, Upper Tything
Postcode	WR1 1HP
Study area	350 Square metres
Site coordinates	SO 84760 55800 52.199818552201 -2.22300964938 52 11 59 N 002 13 22 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 20.5m Max: 20.6m

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
Digital Contents	"none"
Paper Archive recipient	county museum
Paper Media available	"Photograph","Plan","Report","Section","Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Royal Grammar School Worcester Upper Tything, Worcester. Archaeological Recording; Phase 2
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Cook, S
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