

Report No. 1012

An Archaeological Watching Brief
at New Mills Yard, Norwich,
Norfolk

HER 40874 N

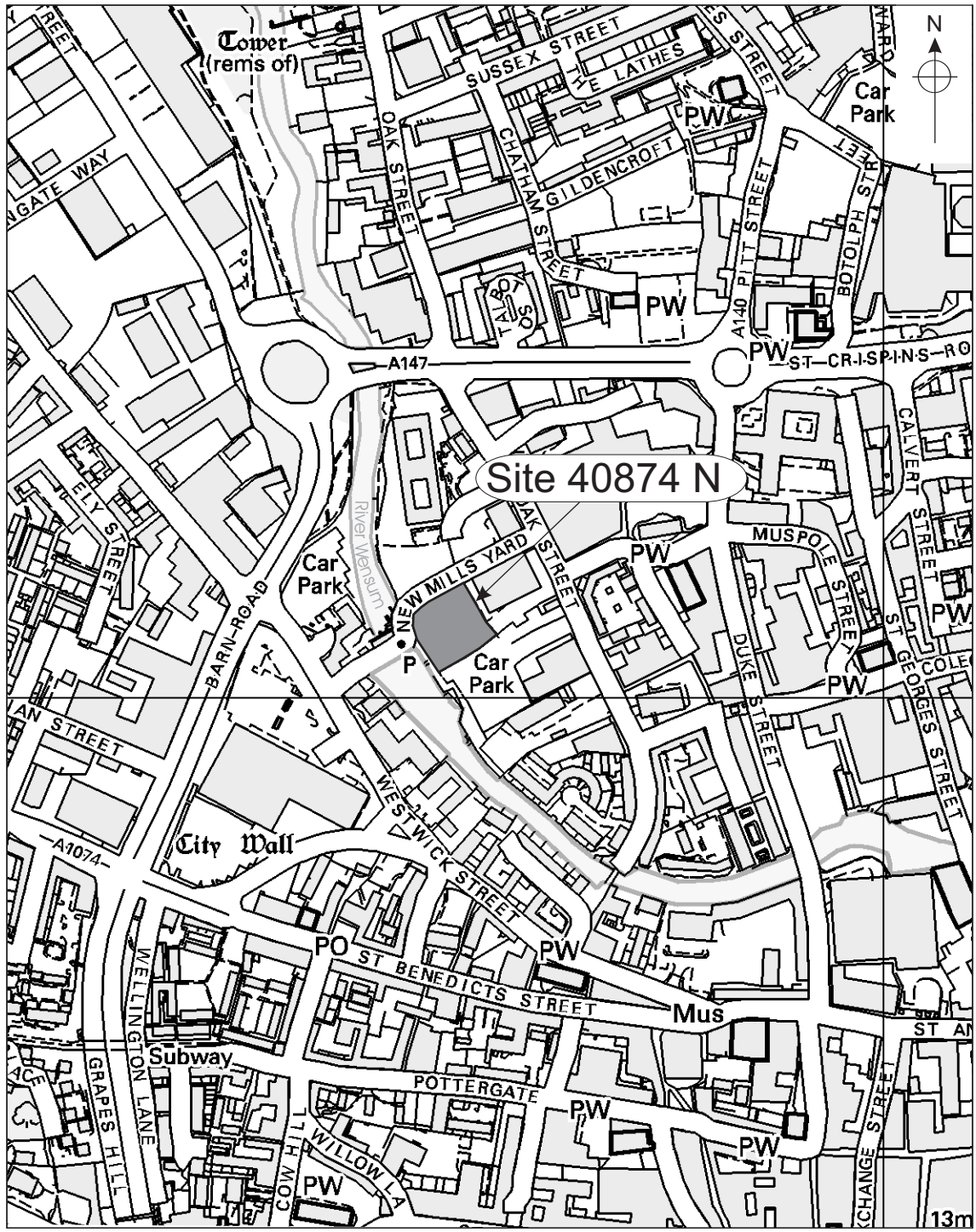


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

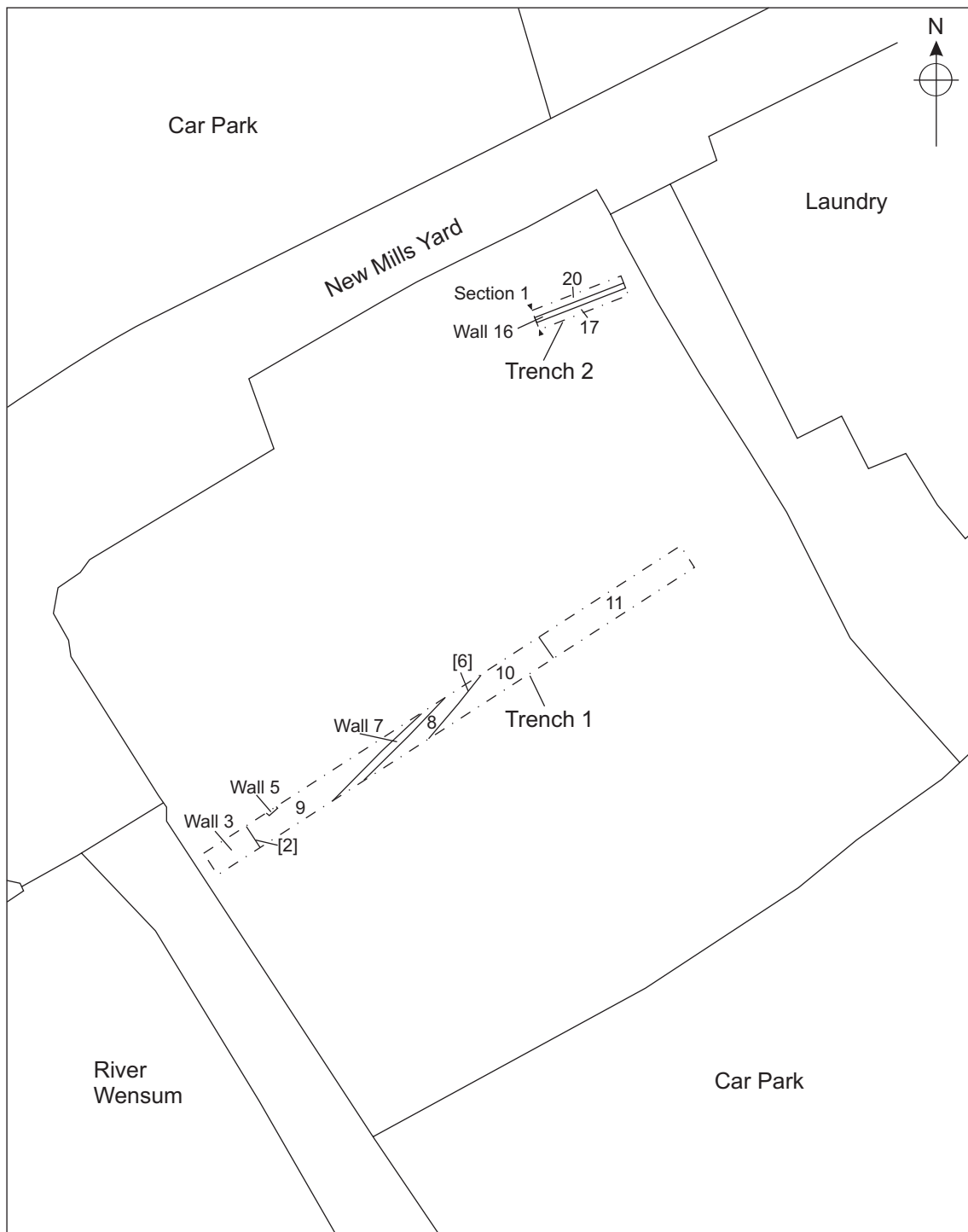


Figure 2. Plan of features. Scale 1:500

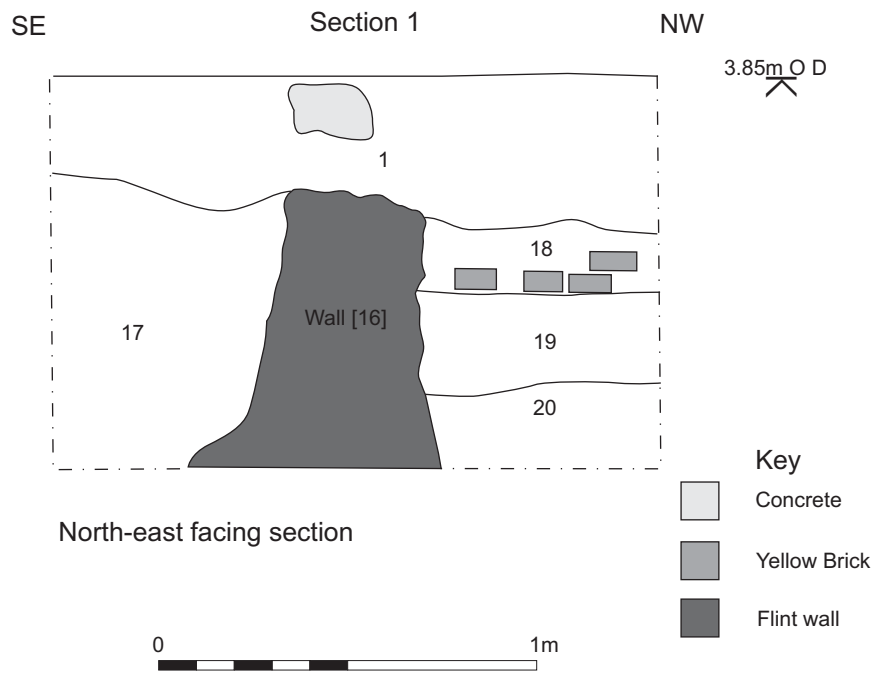


Figure 3. Section showing flint wall [16]. Scale 1:20

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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Norwich**

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Peter Eric Crawley

November 2004

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Local Authority No. 100019340

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Location: New Mills Yard, Oak Street, Norwich
District: Norwich
Grid Ref: TG 2270 0905
HER No.: 40874
Date of fieldwork: 18th October 2004

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at New Mills Yard, Oak Street, Norwich, to monitor the excavation of pile-proving trenches within an area of development. The site was situated to the east of the river Wensum, near to the location of a medieval Watermill.

Recent demolition deposits, relatively recent levelling deposits and the remains of late 19th-century to 20th-century buildings were recorded. To the north-east end of the site a flint and mortar wall, with associated floor surfaces, was uncovered. No other remains of archaeological significance were found.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

A watching brief was undertaken by Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) on an area of proposed housing development at New Mills Yard, Oak Street, Norwich. The size of the area observed was 60m by 80m (4800 sq. m).

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: ARJH/25/02/02). The project was commissioned and funded by Hopkins Homes Ltd.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

(Fig. 1)

The site was situated on a natural slope between Oak Street and the River Wensum, with the line of Oak Street delineating an area of slightly higher ground to the east. The solid geology underlying the site is chalk overlain by alluvial sands and gravels. In previous archaeological investigations in the vicinity (Penn 1999; Adams 2000; Wallis in prep) the sands and gravels were encountered at 0.75m OD.

Previous work has also indicated that the River Wensum has narrowed or changed its course over time and because of this the site may lay on an area which has been heavily made-up with deliberately dumped deposits to stabilise a shifting bank.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

(Fig. 1)

The survey area was situated in an area of archaeological and historical interest.

Norwich is thought to have its origins in the Middle Saxon period (c. 650 to 850), the Late Saxon town being formed by the amalgamation of smaller, pre-existing settlements (Ayers 1994). The presence of two pre-Conquest churches, St Mary Coslany and St Michael Coslany (Carter 1983) testify to the importance of the area during the Late Saxon period, which by 1066 was a growing suburb of the town. With the construction of the medieval city wall in the late 1200s and early 1300s Oak Street was firmly established within the city itself.

Documentary evidence provided by the Enrolled Deeds suggests many trades requiring a water supply were located in this part of the city during the early medieval period. Leather tanning, cloth dying and fulling (cloth preparation) were all noxious processes that depended on water (in this case from the River Wensum).

From the 1700s onward large scale industrial activity occupied the area to the west. By the late 1800s, brewing, iron working and the milling of corn and paper were all activities taking place in this part of town, again exploiting the river as resource and transport route. The decline of these industries in the 20th century combined with significant bomb damage (WW2) has made the area ripe for redevelopment.

A large excavation and two evaluation excavations have been undertaken relatively close to the site of this watching brief. To the south (site 26435) two trenches were opened, one on Coslany Street frontage and another closer to the River Wensum (Wallis in prep). The excavation revealed occupation of the site had commenced between the mid 10th to early 12th centuries, and that management of the river (with the construction of wooden revetments) had also begun at that time. A large quantity of iron working debris was recovered, which suggested that smelting and smithing had taken place in the vicinity. This early activity was followed by a combination of natural accumulation and deliberate dumping of material. Occupation seems to have recommenced in the mid 12th to mid 14th centuries and had shifted away from the river towards the Coslany Street frontage. Medieval property boundaries were also recorded, although excavation work nearer the street frontage was limited. Deposits of waste material, particularly cattle horn cores, dated to the 14th to 16th centuries and indicated a nearby source of butchery waste.

Work was carried out close-by to the south at 7 Oak Street (Site 26503) which demonstrated that the low-lying land between Oak Street and the River Wensum had been reclaimed, in the medieval period, by large-scale dumping of metalworking debris. Substantial buildings were erected in the later Middle ages after further consolidation with tipped chalk. This area was cleared in the 1940s after bombing (Penn 1999).

In April 2000 a desk based assessment of the whole development area was carried out (Penn 2000).

Work was also carried out on the opposite side of Oak Street at number 12 (Site 26535N) which revealed evidence of metal working, with features of 10th- to 11th-century date being sealed by 11th- to 12th-century surfaces. Intensive occupation throughout the following centuries was also recorded on the site (Adams 2000).

An archaeological evaluation by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) just to the south of the site (Site 26587) revealed an old channel of the river Wensum, 13th- and 14th-century industrial activity sealed by refuse dumps dated between the 15th to 17th centuries and cellared buildings appearing from the 18th century onwards (Gardner 2001).

Work was carried out at land off Oak Street and Mandela Close (Site 39691) by APS Archaeology which revealed the *in situ* foundations of an undated stone building (Hall 2003).

Immediately to the south-west on the River Wensum there is documentary evidence for a Watermill (1066 to 1539 A.D) and for a Fulling Mill (1540 to 1900 A.D.) These mills were both situated on the site of the present pumping station (Site 26142) which is itself a listed building.

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence affected by the ground works prior to a housing development on the site. The brief required constant attendance by the archaeologist whilst subsurface obstructions, particularly concrete stanchions were removed using a JCB excavator.

The pile-proving excavations were initiated to remove subsurface obstructions, particularly concrete stanchions and ring beams, prior to the commencement of structural piling.

Use of the metal detector was confined to scanning *in situ* exposed surfaces only, because of the disturbed and mixed nature of the other deposits present on site. All hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

Two areas, Trenches 1 and 2, were particularly examined for obstructions. Trench 1 (2m x 44m) was excavated across the middle of the site. Trench 2 (7.4m x 10m) was situated to the north-east of Trench 1.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

A level was transferred from an existing ground level survey plan undertaken by Hopkins homes Ltd.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

Site conditions were very good with clear access onto and around the site. The weather conditions were also very good throughout the monitoring period.

5.0 Results

(Figs 2 and 3; Appendix 1)

A summary of all deposits observed can be found in Appendix 1 at the back of this report.

Trench 1

(Fig. 2)

After the removal of a compressed rubble layer ([1]) three modern structures were observed. A wall ([7]) orientated north-to-south consisted of ten courses of red brick bonded with a hard white mortar. Further to the west a second wall ([5]) was found, it was composed of frogged bricks bonded with a sandy cement. At the western end of the trench a combined 'T' shaped section of wall ([3]) was found, it was composed of frogged bricks, bonded with a hard white mortar. In all three cases the walls were observed to have associated linear cuts ([6], [4] and [2] respectively). A crushed rubble make-up layer ([15]) was cut by all three walls which overlay an earlier make-up layer ([9]).

At the north eastern end of the trench, a crushed rubble, mortar and clinker levelling layer ([10]) was also cut by the linear wall cut [6]. A light grey clay ([11]) which had occasional fragments of rubble was seen at the base of Trench 1 at the north-east end. Unfortunately this deposit had no relationship with layer [9] due to an area of modern disturbance between. Above clay deposit [11] was a light grey silty clay and mortar make-up layer ([12]), but again it had no relationship with deposits to the south-west because of the modern disturbance mentioned above.

Trench 2

(Figs 2 and 3)

After the removal of the same modern crushed rubble layer [1] seen in Trench 1, a north-east to south-west flint and mortar wall ([16]) was visible. It was composed of flint cobbles ranging from 80mm to 120mm across bonded with a yellow cream coloured sandy mortar. The wall was 0.40m wide at the top and slightly broader (0.70m) lower down, although the base was not observed.

On the north-west side of the wall two deposits [18] and [19] butted against it. The higher of the two ([18]) was a loose light grey gritty silt, c 0.20m thick, containing whole yellow bricks, which were possibly used as a rudimentary surface. Below this ([19]) was similarly a loose grey gritty silt, c. 0.25m thick, with a prominent lens of builders sand visible. Both of these deposits had a mixed and disturbed appearance, with occasional charcoal, mortar and broken brick fragments.

Below layer [19], a surface ([20]) was seen to butt against wall [16], this layer consisted of three parts which were probably episodes of re-surfacing. The lowest element was a compressed metallised layer (the small stones forming the metallising were 30mm to 50mm in size range) above this was a dark black spread of crushed clinker and on top was a final surface of white sandy mortar. All three elements were around 60mm thick. It seems probable that this surface ([20]) is associated with the ?medieval flint wall ([16]).

On the south western side of the wall a layer (c. 0.75m deep) of dark grey gritty clay silt ([17]) was observed butting against wall [16]. This was a mixed make-up layer from which finds were recovered.

6.0 The Finds

(Appendix 2)

A summary of all the artefacts retrieved during this watching brief can be found in Appendix 2 at the back of this report.

The post-medieval pottery

(Appendix 3)

The ceramics were quantified by the number of sherds present in each context, the vessels represented and the weight of each fabric. Other characteristics were noted and an overall date range for the pottery in each context was established. The pottery was recorded on *pro forma* sheets by context using letter codes based on fabric and form.

The fabric codes used are based mainly on those identified in *Eighteen centuries of pottery from Norwich* (Jennings 1981) and supplemented by additional ones compiled by the Suffolk Unit (S Anderson, unpublished fabric list).

In total only six sherds, weighing 0.142kg, of pottery were recovered from the site. Five of these sherds, which date between the 18th and 19th centuries, were from the very mixed layer of crushed rubble ([1]). One fragment of Tin glazed earthenware, which could date from the 16th century onwards, was also found.

Ceramic tobacco pipe

A fragment of late post-medieval ceramic tobacco pipe came from a mixed layer ([17]) adjacent to wall [16].

Faunal remains

(Appendix 4)

A total of 0.035kg of faunal remains were recovered from two contexts during excavations at New Mills Yard, Oak Street, Norwich. Both contexts are thought to be of a post-medieval date. A single molar from a young adult sheep was recovered from the modern rubble and debris layer ([1]) which covered the site. Also found was a chopped fragment of cattle vertebrae and a chopped cattle rib from a dark grey silt layer ([17]).

Few conclusions can be made from such a small assemblage, but the remains from [17] are clearly waste from butchering and food.

7.0 Conclusions

This watching brief has demonstrated that over most of the western and southern part of the site, the present ground work has disturbed only late 19th or 20th century buildings and make-up layers. In the north-eastern corner of the site, however, a probable medieval flint wall with an associated surface was recorded. It is possible that this wall was related to the mill complexes known to have existed in the area during the medieval and post-medieval periods.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Hopkins Homes who commissioned and funded this report. Lucy Talbot processed the finds, Julie Curl reported on the faunal remains and Richenda Goffin analysed the pottery. The Illustrations were prepared by Steve Tatler. The report was formatted by Maggie Foottit and edited by Alice Lyons.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Layer	Modern rubble and debris	Modern
2	Cut	Cut for wall [3]	Post-medieval
3	Masonry	Red brick walls	Post-medieval
4	Cut	Cut for wall [5]	Post-medieval
5	Masonry	Red brick wall	Post-medieval
6	Cut	Cut for wall [7]	Post-medieval
7	Masonry	Red brick wall	Post-medieval
8	Fill	Fill of cut [6]	Post-medieval
9	Layer	Mixed light grey clay	Post-medieval
10	Layer	Crushed rubble and mortar	Post-medieval
11	Layer	Light grey clay	Post-medieval
12	Layer	Light grey silty clay and mortar	Post-medieval
13	Fill	Fill of [2]	Post-medieval
14	Fill	Fill of [4]	Post-medieval
15	Layer	Rubble and crushed coal	Post-medieval
16	Masonry	Cobble wall	Medieval to post-medieval?
17	Layer	Dark grey silt	Post-medieval
18	Layer	Light grey silt	Post-medieval
19	Layer	Light grey silt	Post-medieval
20	Layer	Surfaces	Medieval to post-medieval?
21	Masonry	Red brick wall	Post-medieval

Appendix 2: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
1	Pottery	5	0.132	Post-medieval
1	Ceramic tobacco pipe	1	0.007	Post-medieval
1	Animal bone	-	0.005	-
17	Pottery	1	0.001	Post-medieval
17	Window glass	2	-	Post-medieval
17	Bottle glass	2	-	Post-medieval
17	Animal bone	-	0.029	-

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Date
1	Iron glazed wear	Dish	1	0.42	18th to 20th century
1	Tin glazed earthenware	Body	1	0.05	16th to 20th century
1	Refined white earthenware	Dish	1	0.18	19th to 20th century
1	Creamware?	Body	1	0.08	18th to 19th century
1	Iron glazed ware?	Body	1	0.59	1855+
17	Late post-medieval earthenware	Body	1	0.02	18th to 20th century

Appendix 4: Faunal Remains

Context	Species	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Comments
1	Sheep	1	0.005	Molar, young adult
17	Cattle	2	0.029	Chopped rib and vertebrae