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PERTH THEATRE, 185 HIGH STREET, PERTH

Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief

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PROJECT SUMMARY SHEET

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<i>Council</i>	PERTH AND KINROSS
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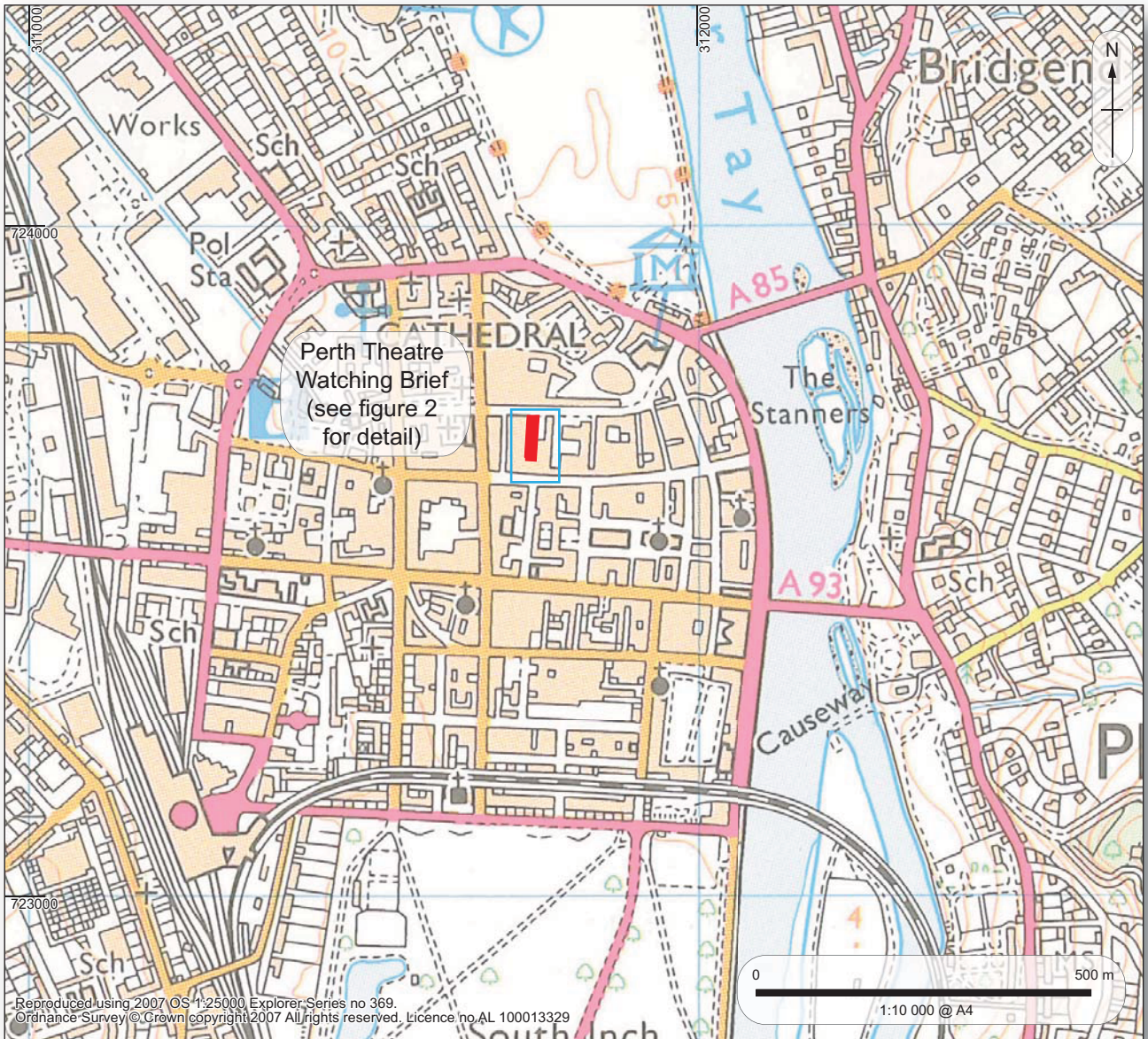
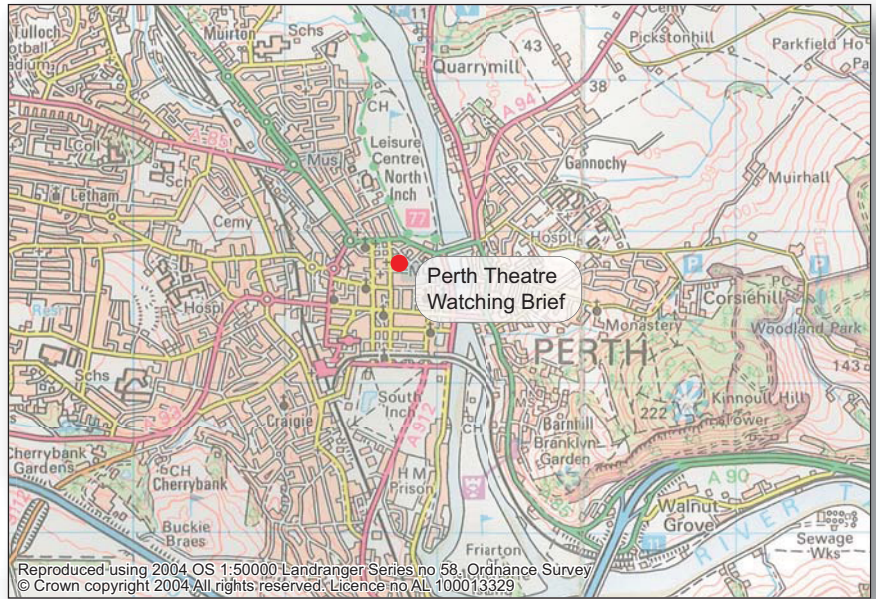
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
SITE LOCATION AND BACKGROUND	1
METHODOLOGY	1
RESULTS	2
Hand excavated trial holes	2
Boreholes	2
CONCLUSION	3
REFERENCES	3
Cartographic	3
Bibliographic	3
APPENDIX 1 – ENGINEERS BOREHOLE DATA	4
Window sample boreholes	4
Cable percussive boreholes	5
APPENDIX 2 – PHOTO REGISTER	7



Illus 1
Location plan

PERTH THEATRE, 185 HIGH STREET, PERTH

Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief

by Jamie Humble

Four engineer's trial holes were excavated around Perth theatre, along with seven boreholes in advance of renovation and development. The trial holes were excavated in order to investigate the foundations of the building, as a result the excavations were limited in extent to areas previously excavated for the construction of the building. Little archaeological information was gained from the trial holes as a result. One trial hole in the basement of the theatre shows that this area has been excavated down to the level of the natural subsoil for the creation of the basement, thus removing any potential archaeology in the area of the basement.

The boreholes suggest that archaeological deposits are present to a depth of around 3m across most of the site. Deeper deposits were encountered in a borehole excavate close to Mill Street, these may be infilling of the defensive town ditch known to be located in the vicinity.

INTRODUCTION

Headland Archaeology Ltd were commissioned by ARUP to conduct archaeological works at Perth theatre, 185 High Street, Perth in advance of renovation and development of the theatre. An archaeological watching brief was carried out on engineers test pits, additionally borehole samples and data were investigated. This programme of archaeological work sought to contribute to the characterisation of the archaeological remains on the site, especially establishing their depth.

SITE LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

Perth Theatre is located at 185 High Street and runs northwards to Mill Street (Illus 1); this location is within the medieval burgh of Perth. The theatre site runs north from the High Street through the backlands bounded by the town defences. Previous archaeological investigations (Bowler *et al*, 1995) during development at the rear of Boots Chemist (137-141 High Street) indicate that the potential for well preserved organic deposits. These excavations conducted between 1979 and 1980 revealed 5m of stratified deposits, with the earliest feature on site being an early 13th century ditch running east to west across the site.

The earliest mapping of the town of Perth is Pont's map of 1583-1601 which shows the town surrounded by a defensive wall but shows no detail. The earliest detailed mapping is Stobie's 1783 map, this shows the site with a rectangular building with a courtyard in the middle and a back plot running to Mill Street with a smaller building on the corner of Mill Street and Cutlog Vennel. Thompson's

map of 1832 shows an almost identical arrangement of buildings and by 1860 with the Ordnance Survey town plan of Perth the building on the high street is labelled as a Paupers Lodging House.

Excavations associated with the extension of the theatre in 1980 were to a depth of around 1.5m (Blanchard & Spearman, 1980). Deposits relating to the 18th and 19th centuries were discovered in these trenches. Pipe trenches were excavated to a depth of 2m however and these did reveal backland deposits. Boreholes within the theatre revealed organic archaeological deposits to a depth of 4m, the location of these is however unknown. Earlier archaeological remains may be sealed beneath these deposits.

There is a high likelihood of significant archaeological remains being present beneath the Perth Theatre.

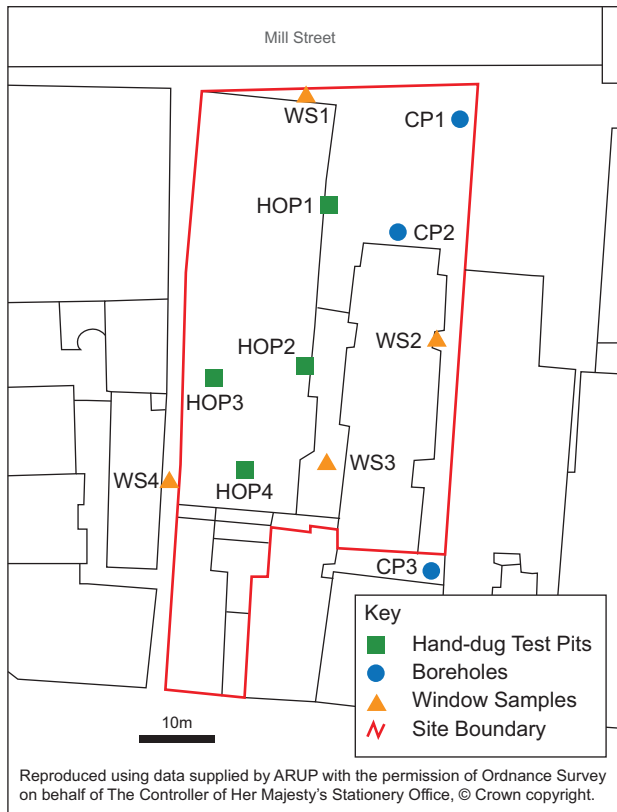
METHODOLOGY

The watching brief over the hand excavated test pits was intended to ensure that any archaeologically significant deposits threatened by test pitting operations were appropriately recorded and to characterise the depth and extent of any archaeological remains on the site.

The location and extent of excavations was determined by the requirements of the engineers. All trial holes were hand excavated.

No significant archaeological features or deposits were present to be recorded. There were no finds nor were any environmental samples taken.

Two types of boreholes were excavated on site, cable percussive boreholes and window sample boreholes. The logs of all the boreholes were examined, the sleeved samples were also inspected in the office of Norwest Holst.



Illus 2
Detail of excavation area

RESULTS

Locations of the hand excavated trial holes and the boreholes are shown in Illus 2.

Hand excavated trial holes

Four trial holes were excavated on the site, three of these were located within the theatre and one was in the car park to the rear of the building.

Trial hole 1 was located outside the theatre building and was excavated to investigate the foundations of the east wall of the theatre. This trial hole measured 0.9m by 0.8m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.8m. The trial hole was excavated within the footprint of the construction cut of the wall to be investigated meaning that no archaeological deposits were observed.

Trial hole 2 was located in the basement (approximately 3m below ground level) under the stage of the theatre, to investigate the foundations of the wall at the front of the stage. This trial hole measured 0.7m by 0.5m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.05m. Underlying the concrete floor was a deposit of rubble and broken brick, interpreted as a levelling for the floor. Under this rubble lay natural sand deposits, implying that the excavations to create the basement have removed any archaeological deposits.

Trial hole 3 was located at the front of the theatre auditorium on the west side of the stage. This trial hole was intended to investigate the foundations the rear wall of a former orchestra pit built contemporarily with the

theatre but subsequently filled in. The top of the wall was discovered where it was thought to be but excavation to the base of the wall was abandoned due to fears of the auditorium floor collapsing into the hole.

Trial hole 4 was located at the rear of the theatre auditorium and was excavated to investigate the foundations of the rear wall of the auditorium. This trial hole measured 0.4m by 0.2m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.9m. Underlying the floor was a deposit of rubble and brick that is interpreted as the backfill of the construction cut for the auditorium wall, this deposit continued to the base of the trial hole and no deposits of archaeological significance were observed.

Boreholes

The following presents a summary of the results of the borehole excavations, full records can be found in Appendix 1.

WS1

Window sample borehole 1 was located to the north of the theatre on the pavement of Mill Street. 1m of modern made ground of red gravelly sand overlay clayey sands and gravels to a depth of 4.45m at which depth there was a band of silt containing a dogs tooth. Underlying this was natural gravelly sand.

WS2

Window sample borehole 2 was located to the east of the theatre approximately half way between the High Street and Mill Street. 0.5m of sandy gravel made ground overlay clayey sands and gravels to a depth of 2.7m, with a band of silt below to 3m. Underlying this were natural sands.

WS3

Window sample borehole 3 was located inside the theatre buildings towards the south of the site. 0.15m of tarmac and hardcore overlay sandy gravel to a depth of 2m. Below this lay was clayey silt to a depth of 4.1m with a peat deposit beneath. The natural sands were reached at 5.2m.

WS4

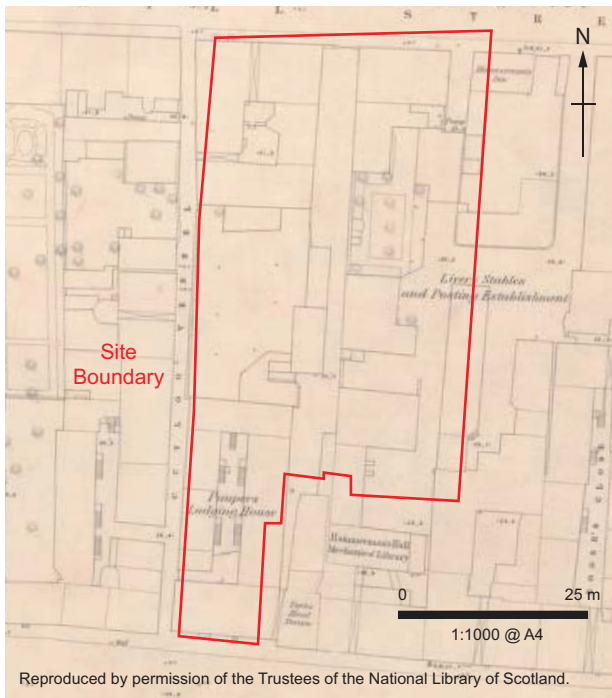
Window sample borehole 4 was located in the Cutlog Vennel to the west of the site. Excavation of this borehole was halted at 0.79m due to the presence of live services. The deposits excavated are the backfill of these services.

CP1

Cable percussive borehole 1 was located at the north-east corner of the site, close to Mill Street. 0.4m of tarmac and modern made ground overlay sandy clay to a depth of 3m. Below lay natural deposits of clayey sands.

CP2

Cable percussive borehole 2 was located to the north of the theatre buildings. 0.33m of tarmac and underlying

**Illus 3**

Ordnance Survey 1860 town plan showing site location

hardcore overlay deposits of sandy gravelly silt to a depth of 2.9m. Below lay natural sand deposits.

CP3

Cable percussive borehole 3 was located to the south-east of the site, close to the High Street. 0.4m of ash, sands and gravel made ground overlay sandy clay to a depth of 2m. Below lay a deposit of peat to a depth of 3.9m with natural sands below.

CONCLUSION

Very little archaeological information was gained from the four trial holes excavated around Perth Theatre. Trial hole 3, located in the basement of the theatre shows that the excavations to create the basement under the stage have destroyed any archaeological deposits in this area. However in other areas the excavation was confined to within the footprint of the construction cut for the walls, therefore the only deposits revealed were associated with the construction of the theatre walls.

The borehole data is more informative of the archaeological remains on the site, they show that archaeological deposits exist to over 3m below ground level across most of the site with deeper deposits in areas.

There is a strong possibility that the deeper deposits encountered in WS1 are due to this borehole being located over the towns defensive ditch. The fact that the deposits in CP1 are shallower suggests that the edge of the ditch lies at some point between these two boreholes.

Both WS3 and CP3 produced deep deposits of peat suggesting that there has formerly been a boggy area

towards the south of the site. Archaeological deposits have built up on top of the peat.

It is probable that the majority of the archaeological deposits on the site are comprised of backland deposits overlain by 18th and 19th century overburden. However none of the deposits in the boreholes suggest the building rubble that would be expected to be created from the demolition of the buildings on site prior to the construction of the theatre.

The archaeological potential for Perth Theatre is high as it lies within the boundaries of the medieval burgh. There is a strong possibility that the 13th century town defences (comprising of a wall and ditch) run east to west across the car park area of the theatre.

REFERENCES

Cartographic

- Pont (1583-1601) *Lower Angus and Perthshire east of the River Tay*
 Anon (1715-16) *An exact plan of the town and adjacent parts of Perth as it was fortified by the rebels*
 Stobie (1783) *Inset on The counties of Perth and Clackmannan*
 Wood (1823) *Plan of the city of Perth from actual survey*
 Thompson (1832) *Inset on Perthshire and Clackmannan*
 Ordnance Survey (1860) *Town Plan, Perth, Sheet XCVIII.5.9*

Bibliographic

- Bowler, Cox & Smith (1995) 'Four Excavations in Perth'. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 125, 917-999
 Blanchard & Spearman (1980) 'Perth Theatre, 183-7 High Street, Midden', *Discovery & Excavation Scotland*, p39

APPENDIX 1 – ENGINEERS BOREHOLE DATA

Window sample boreholes

WS01

Depth (m)	Deposit Description	Interpretation
0.0 – 0.10	Paving cobbles	Pavement surface
0.10 – 1.00	Red very gravely sand. Gravel size fragments are sub-angular to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone	Archaeological deposit Made ground
1.00 – 3.55	Medium dense brown slightly clayey sand and gravel. Gravel is sub-angular to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, basalt and mudstone	Archaeological deposit Possible ditch fill
3.55 – 5.40	Medium dense brown clayey gravely fine to medium sand. Gravel is sub-angular to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, basalt and mudstone. Thin layer of silt at 4.45m containing a possible dogs tooth.	Archaeological deposit Possible ditch fill to layer of silt at 4.45m, Natural deposit below
5.40 & below	Medium dense very gravely fine to coarse sand. Gravel is sub-angular to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, basalt, mudstone and quartz.	Natural deposit

WS02

Depth (m)	Deposit description	Interpretation
0.0 – 0.05	Tarmac	Road surface
0.05 – 0.30	Dark grey sandy angular to sub-angular fine to coarse gravel size fragments of basalt	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground
0.30-0.50	Brown sand and gravel. Gravel size fragments are sub-angular to sub-rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, ash, coal and mudstone. Sand size fragments include ash	Archaeological deposit Made ground
0.50-2.00	Dark grey and dark brown slightly sandy clay. Gravel size fragments are angular to sub rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, ash, coal and mudstone. Sand size fragments include ash	Archaeological deposit Possible backland deposits
2.00-2.70	Dark brown slightly clayey to clayey very sandy gravel. Gravel size fragments are angular to sub-rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, quartz and basalt.	Archaeological deposit Possible backland deposits
2.70-3.00	Light brown slightly sandy silt	Archaeological deposit Possible Backland deposits
3.00-4.00	Medium dense thinly laminated to very thinly bedded brown mottled orange brown slightly clayey fine to coarse sand.	Natural deposit
4.00-4.95	Medium dense brown slightly gravely fine to coarse sand. Gravel is sub-angular to sub-rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, mudstone and quartz.	Natural deposit
4.95 & below	Medium dense brown sand and gravel. Gravel is surrounded fine to coarse of sandstone and basalt. Below 6.00m becomes dense. Below 7.50m becomes very dense.	Natural deposit

WS03

Depth (m)	Deposit description	Interpretation
0.00-0.05	Tarmac	Road surface
0.05-0.15	Hardcore	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground

0.15-1.30	Dark brown clayey very sandy gravel with a low cobble content. Gravel size fragments are angular fine to coarse of sandstone, concrete, occasional burnt coal and quartz. Cobble size fragments are angular of sandstone. From 0.80m very clayey.	Archaeological deposit Made ground
1.30-2.00	Dark brown slightly gravelly sandy very clayey silt with a low cobble content and with coarse gravel to cobble size pockets of slightly sandy silt and slightly sandy slightly gravelly clay. Gravel size fragments are angular to sub-angular fine to coarse of sandstone, burnt coal/charcoal. Cobble size fragments are sub-rounded of quartzite. Tending to gravelly very clayey sand in places.	Archaeological deposit Possible backland deposits
2.00-3.00	Brown slightly gravelly fine sandy very clayey silt with a low cobble content. Gravel size fragments are angular to sub-angular fine to coarse of sandstone and occasional glazed ceramics. Cobble size fragments are angular of sandstone	Archaeological deposit Possible backland deposits
3.00-4.10	Brown slightly gravelly sandy very clayey silt. Gravel is angular to rounded fine of quartz, basalt, coal and sandstone.	Archaeological deposit Possible backland deposits
4.10-5.20	Dark brown slightly sandy amorphous peat with coarse sand and fine gravel size decayed plant remains	Peat
5.20-7.45	Medium dense brown slightly clayey gravelly to very gravelly fine to coarse sand with low cobble content. Gravel is sub-angular to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone and quartz	Natural deposit
7.45 & below	Sand and gravel	Natural deposit

WS04 (Excavation halted at 0.79m due to the presence of live services)

Depth	Deposit description	Interpretation
0.00-0.05	Paving slabs	Pavement surface
0.05-0.20	Brown fine to coarse sand	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground
0.20-0.25	Grey sandy gravel. Gravel size fragments are sub-angular fine to coarse of basalt	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground
0.25-0.79	Dark grey sandy gravelly clay. Gravel size fragments are angular to sub-rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, mudstone, basalt, concrete, brick and porcelain.	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground

Cable percussive boreholes

BH01

Depth (m)	Deposit description	Interpretation
0.00-0.09	Tarmac	Road surface
0.09-0.40	Red gravelly sand. Gravel size fragments are sub-angular of basalt and mudstone.	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground
0.40-3.00	Dark grey slightly sandy slightly gravelly clay. Gravel size fragments are sub-angular to sub-rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, coal and mudstone. Sand size fragments include ash. From 0.50 to 1.20m, with occasional organic remains. Below 2.00m, becoming dark grey and light brown mottled and sandy.	Archaeological deposits
3.00-4.00	Loose brown slightly gravelly clayey sand. Gravel is sub-rounded fine to coarse of sandstone and basalt	Natural deposit
4.00-4.80	Loose brown clayey sand and gravel. Gravel is sub-rounded to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone and basalt	Natural deposit
4.80-8.80	Medium dense sandy gravel. Gravel is sub-rounded to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, basalt, quartz and mudstone	Natural deposit

8.80 & below	Soft light grey and brown slightly sandy slightly gravelly thinly laminated silt. Gravel is sub-rounded to rounded fine to medium of sandstone and mudstone	Natural deposit
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BH02

Depth (m)	Deposit description	Interpretation
0.00-0.12	Tarmac	Road surface
0.12-0.20	Hardcore	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground
0.20-0.33	Dark brown very clayey very sandy gravel. Gravel size fragments are angular fine to coarse of basalt.	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground
0.33-2.90	Dark brown slightly sandy slightly gravelly silt. Gravel size fragments are angular to sub-angular fine to medium of ash, charcoal and occasional sandstone. From 1.20-1.70m, rare bone fragments noted. From 2.00-2.50m, with gravel to cobble size pockets of clay.	Archaeological deposits
2.90-5.20	Loose to medium dense brown slightly clayey fine to medium sand. From 2.90-3.50m, with occasional laminae of dark brown and light brown slightly sandy silt.	Natural deposit
5.20-6.00	Medium dense brown slightly clayey very gravelly fine to coarse sand. Gravel is angular to rounded fine to coarse of mixed lithologies including quartz, basalt, sandstone and quartzite.	Natural deposit
6.00-9.20	Medium dense brown slightly clayey very sandy gravel. Gravel is angular to rounded of mixed lithologies including quartz, basalt, sandstone and quartzite.	Natural deposit
9.20 & below	Brown slightly fine sandy silt	Natural deposit

BH03

Depth (m)	Deposit description	Interpretation
0.00-0.05	Ash	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground
0.05-0.40	Brown sand and gravel. Gravel size fragments are sub-angular to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone and basalt.	Archaeological deposit Modern made ground
0.40-2.00	Dark grey locally brown slightly gravelly sandy clay with occasional organic remains. Gravel size fragments are angular to sub-rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, basalt, glass and fabric.	Archaeological deposit Possible backland deposits
2.00-3.90	Black and dark brown slightly gravelly pseudo fibrous peat with low cobble content. Gravel is sub-rounded to rounded fine to coarse of basalt and wood. Cobbles are angular of wood	Peat
3.90-5.00	Loose light brown silty fine to medium sand.	Natural deposit
5.00-7.00	Loose brown locally yellow slightly gravelly silty fine to coarse sand. Gravel is sub-rounded to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone, basalt and quartz. Below 6.00m, becoming medium dense and very gravelly.	Natural deposit
7.00-8.00	Dense brown sand and gravel. Gravel is sub-rounded to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone and basalt.	Natural deposit
8.00 & below	Dense brown very sandy gravel. Gravel is sub-rounded to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone and basalt. Below 9.00m, becoming sandy.	Natural deposit

APPENDIX 2 – PHOTO REGISTER

Photo No	Direction	Description
1	S	Interior of theatre
2	N	Interior of theatre
3	–	ID Shot
4	W	Location of trial hole 1
5	S	Location of trial hole 2
6	S	Location of trial hole 2
7	N	Location of trial hole 2
8	S	Trial hole 2 excavated
9	W	Trial hole 2 excavated
10	S	Location of trial hole 3
11	S	Trial hole 3 excavated
12	W	Trial hole 3 excavated
13	W	Trial hole 3 excavated
14	S	Location of trial hole 3
15	S	Location of trial hole 3
16	S	Trial hole 4 excavated
17	S	Trial hole 4 excavated
18	W	Location of trial hole 4
19	NW	Location of trial hole 1
20	NW	Location of trial hole 1
21	E	Location of trial hole 4
22	SE	Location of trial hole 4
