

**FORMER AUCTION ROOMS,
THE PLANKS, OLD TOWN
SWINDON**

NGR: SU 1595 8360

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Quality Assurance

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SUMMARY

In August 2007 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological evaluation on land at The Planks, Swindon (NGR: SU 1595 8360). The project was commissioned by EDP, acting on behalf of Greystone Developments UK Ltd.

Planning permission has been sought for the redevelopment of the former auction rooms site. The archaeological advisor to Swindon Borough Council (SBC), which is Wiltshire County Council (WCC), requested that an archaeological evaluation should be completed to inform determination of the planning application for the site, in accordance with PPG16 (1990).

The evaluation comprised the excavation and recording of three test-pits, the locations of which were amended slightly from the original proposed locations due to on-site constraints.

The evaluation revealed probable Medieval beaten earth floors in Trenches 1 and 2 and a possible Medieval wall in Trench 3. The medieval deposits were sealed by successive episodes of Post-medieval make-up, levelling and cobbled surfaces beneath the modern concrete yard surface.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

Medieval

The period between the Norman Conquest (AD 1066) and *circa* AD 1500.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance Datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

OS

Ordnance Survey.

Post-Medieval

Period from *circa* AD 1500 onwards.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Foundations Archaeology in August 2007 on land at The Planks, Swindon (NGR: SU 1595 8360). The project was commissioned by EDP, on behalf of Greystone Developments UK Ltd.
- 1.2 Planning permission has been sought for the redevelopment of the former auction rooms site. The archaeological advisor to Swindon Borough Council (SBC), which is Wiltshire County Council (WCC), requested that an archaeological evaluation should be completed to inform determination of the planning application for the site, in accordance with PPG16 (1990).
- 1.3 The archaeological work was undertaken in accordance with the specification prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2007), the principals of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (DoE 1990) and the archaeological policies of SBC.
- 1.4 This report constitutes the results of the archaeological works.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Planning Permission has been applied for, in order to redevelop the site of the former auction rooms. A programme of archaeological works was required prior to determination of the planning application.
- 2.2 The site lies close to the centre of Old Town in Swindon. Previous archaeological works within the area of Old Town have identified the presence of Roman, Saxon and Medieval finds and features. The study area itself is within the area of the Medieval town and lies close to the remains of Holy Rood Church. This was the parish church for Swindon from 1154 until its partial destruction in 1852.
- 2.3 The study area therefore contained the potential for the preservation of archaeological features and deposits, predominately dated to the Roman, Saxon and Medieval periods. This however did not prejudice the works against the retrieval of information from other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains; as well as to make recommendations for management of the resource, including further archaeological works if necessary. In turn this would allow reasonable planning decisions to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the areas affected by the proposed development.

3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:

i) To define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;

ii) To attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;

iii) To recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The project required the excavation of five 1m by 1m test-pits. In the event two of the test-pits, which were located inside the standing buildings, could not be excavated and, following negotiations with WCC, three 2m x 2m test pits, all of which were located in the open yard area, were excavated as shown on Figure 3.

4.2 Non-significant overburden was removed to the top of archaeological deposits or natural, whichever was encountered first. This was achieved with the use of a mechanical excavator with a toothless grading bucket. Thereafter the trenches were cleaned and all additional excavation was conducted by hand.

4.3 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the Specification and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

5 RESULTS

5.1 **Test-pit 1** was excavated onto a compact dark orange brown clay surface (106) which was present across the entire test-pit at a depth of 0.48m (133.14m OD) from the modern ground surface. The surface contained occasional limestone fragments and charcoal flecks. A sherd of medieval pottery was pressed into the top of the surface, along with an oyster shell.

5.2 Surface (106) was overlain by a thin layer of dark brown silty clay (105) up to 0.08m thick, from which no finds were recovered. This layer was sealed in turn by a much disturbed layer of sand, gravel and small limestone slabs forming the remnants of a cobbled surface (104), which appeared to slope slightly down from north to south. A small assemblage of ceramic brick and tile of Post-medieval date was recovered from this layer.

5.3 The cobbled surface was sealed in turn by a make-up/levelling layer of dumped clay interleaved with bands of sand and rubble (103) up to 0.2m thick, from which fragments of brick, tile and slate were recovered. A second

cobbled surface (102), up to 0.16m thick and in relatively good repair, was located atop layer (103) and probably represents a courtyard surface contemporary with the Auction Rooms. It was sealed in turn by the modern concrete surface (101) up to 0.16m thick.

- 5.4 **Test-pit 2** was excavated onto the natural. The natural substrate comprised yellow sandy clay with limestone fragments encountered at an average depth of 0.95m (132.50m OD) from the modern ground surface. The natural substrate was overlain by (206), a mid grey brown silty clay soil, up to 0.26m thick, from which no finds were recovered. This was sealed by (205), which was a thin, light brown compact clay layer, up to 0.02m thick. This may represent a similar beaten earth surface to that discovered in Test-pit 1. This was sealed by (204), a layer of dark brown silty clay, probably representing either garden soil or a natural soil accumulation.
- 5.5 Layer (204) was overlain by a make-up layer of blue grey clay (203), up to 0.25m thick. This was sealed in turn by a layer of mid grey brown silty clay (202), 0.12m thick, from which a number of 17th-18th century sherds of pottery were recovered, along with fragments of at least three early 18th century onion bottles, fragments of ceramic tile, animal bone and oyster shell and a sherd of late 18th-early 19th century pearlware. This layer was directly overlain by the modern concrete yard surface (201), 0.10m thick.
- 5.6 **Test-pit 3** was excavated onto light blue-grey natural clays at an average depth of 1.02m (131.79m OD) from the modern ground surface. The natural clays were overlaid by (309), a clean yellow orange limestone grit up to 0.48m thick that might also be of natural origin. This was sealed by (306) a dark brown silty clay layer, up to 0.12m thick and which was probably equivalent to (204) in Trench 2.
- 5.7 A remnant of un-mortared stone wall [308]/(307) survived in the northeastern corner of the test-pit. The wall survived to a height of only 0.48m, but its full dimensions could not otherwise be ascertained. The base of the wall cut slightly into the top of layer (309). A single sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from within the wall matrix.
- 5.8 Layer (306), up to 0.12m thick, was sealed beneath a layer of crushed limestone and broken limestone fragments (305), which petered out to the south and west of wall [308]. A small quantity of animal bone was recovered from this layer, along with two sherds of 18th century pottery. Layer (305) was overlain by a layer of blue grey clay make-up/levelling with limestone fragments (304) up to 0.25m thick, from which a number of finds were recovered, including animal bone, glass, tile and late 18th – early 19th century pottery.
- 5.9 This make-up layer was sealed beneath a thin layer of crushed limestone fragments (303), up to 0.10m thick, which, like (305), also petered out towards the south of the wall. The top of the wall and layer (303) were sealed by a deposit of yellow sand (302), up to 0.24m thick, which formed the make-up for the modern concrete surface (301), up to 0.23m thick.

6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The archaeological works revealed a possible Medieval wall fragment in Trench 3, as well as probable Medieval beaten earth floors in Trench 1 and Trench 2.
- 6.2 Evidence from all three trenches indicated that natural and early deposits slope from north to south, following the natural contour of the hill, and were later levelled out to provide a flat surface.
- 6.3 The results of the evaluation have demonstrated that there was Medieval occupation of 12th-14th century date within the site area, which was subsequently sealed beneath successive episodes of Post-medieval make-up levelling and cobbled surfaces from around the 17th century through to the modern period. Some caution must be expressed with regard to the Post-medieval dating; finds from layer (202), for instance, date from the 17th century through to the early 19th century and may have originated as broken material from the Auction House, rather than domestic refuse.
- 6.4 A small finds assemblage was recovered during the evaluation. Artefactual material consisted of two medieval sherds, both from the Minety kilns in northwest Wiltshire. A number of Post-medieval pottery sherds were also recovered, including Glazed Red Earthenwares of 17th-19th century, a sherd of Aachen/Frechen stoneware (17th century) and a sherd of English stoneware (18th century), along with a number of sherds of late 18th-19th century china wares.
- 6.5 Several fragments of ceramic tile were also recovered, along with fragments of early 18th century onion bottles. Ecofactual evidence was restricted to two fragments of adult cattle rib bone and an unidentified fragment from layer (202), two further adult cattle bones from layer (304) and six fragments of adult sheep/goat bone from layer (305). Oyster shells were recovered from layers (106) and (202).
- 6.6 No archaeological or artefactual evidence of Roman date was present within the evaluated area.
- 6.7 The archive will be deposited with Swindon Museum. An OASIS form will also be completed and submitted.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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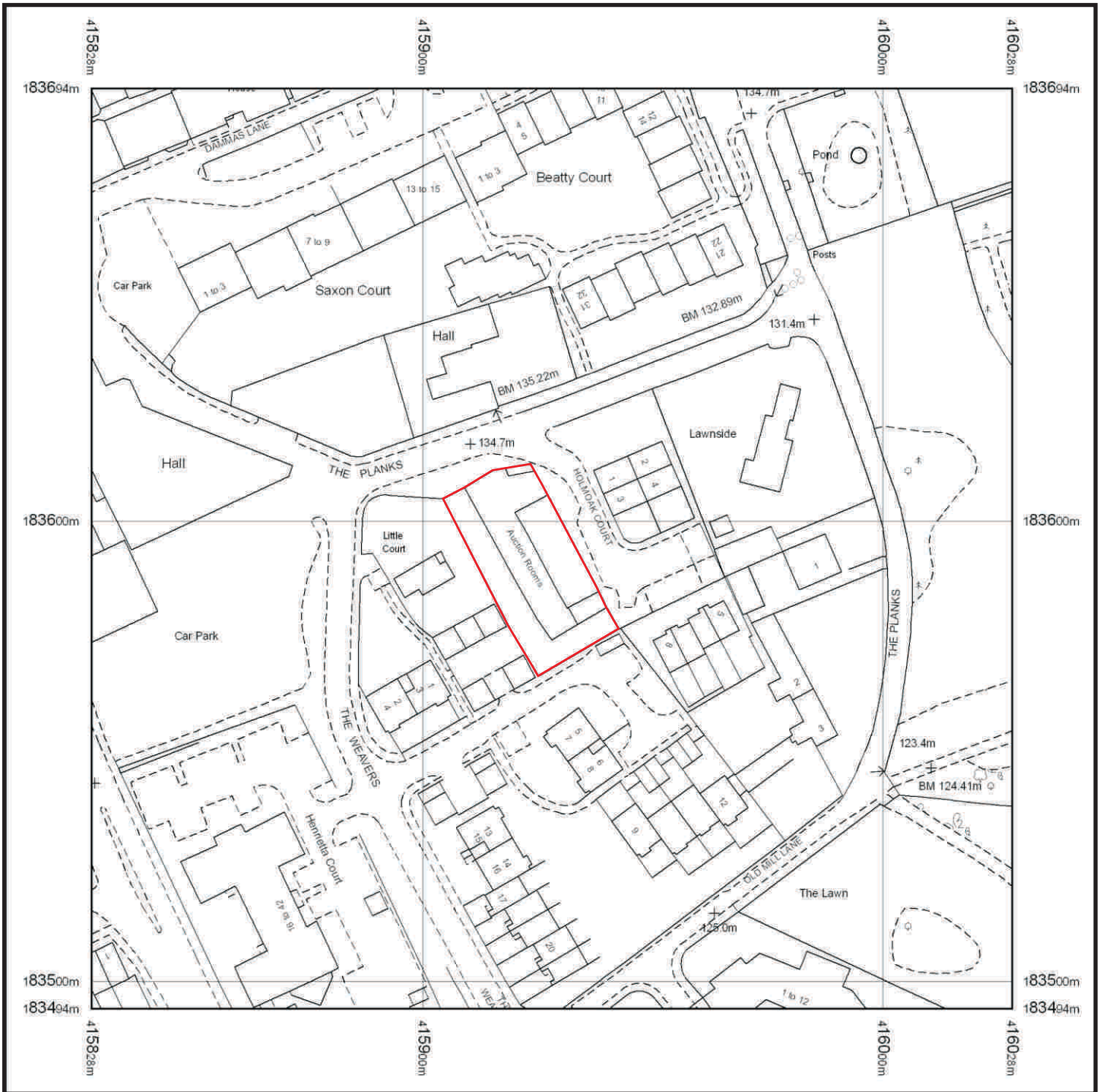
8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FIGURE 1: Site Location



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FIGURE 2: Study Area Location

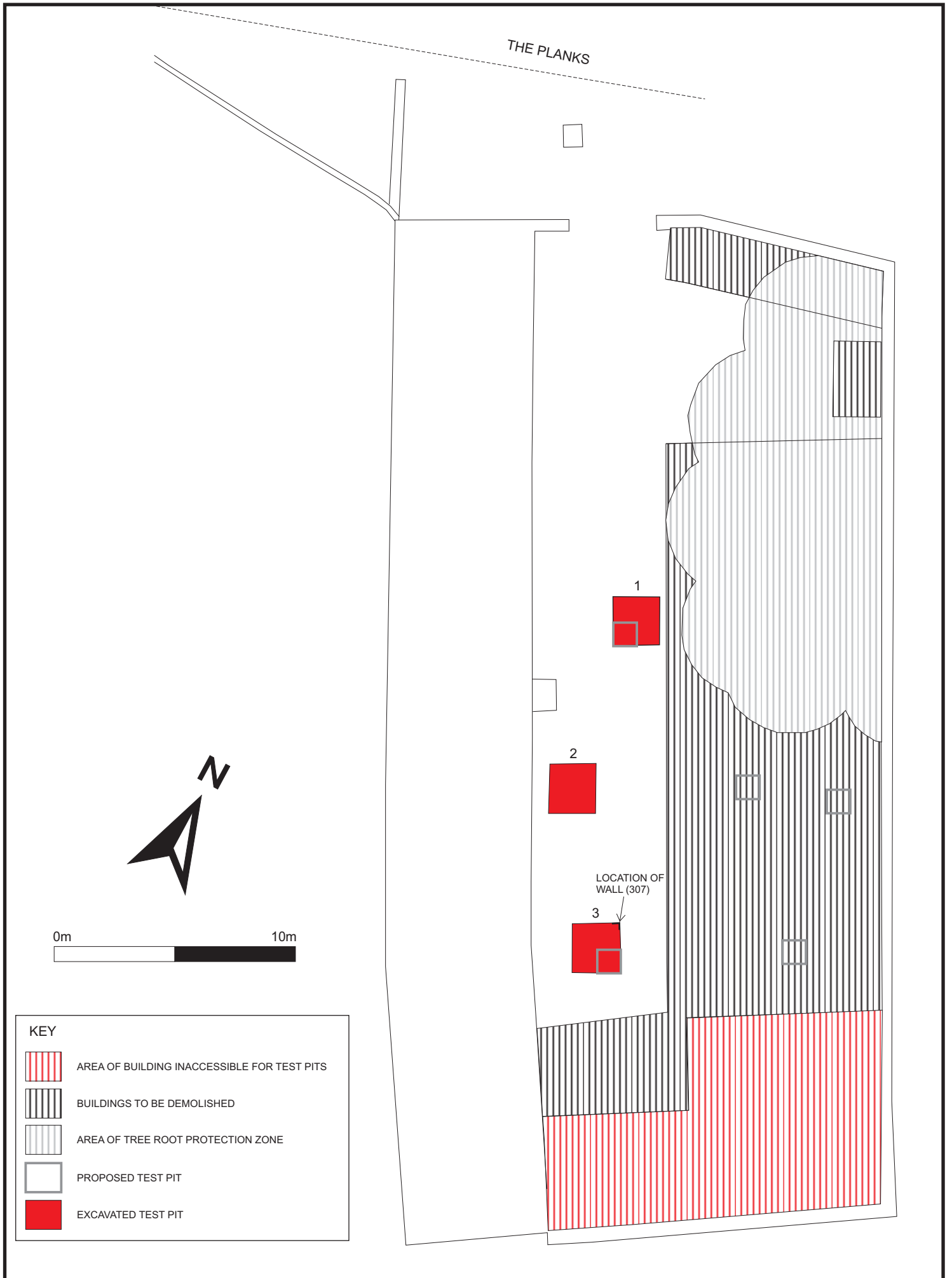
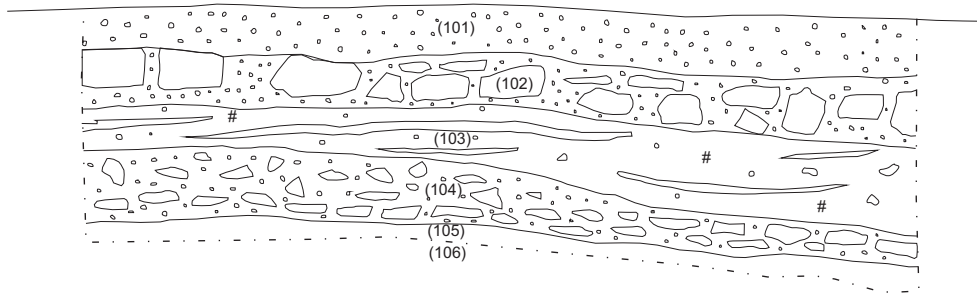


FIGURE 3: Test Pit Locations

134.04m
N ↗

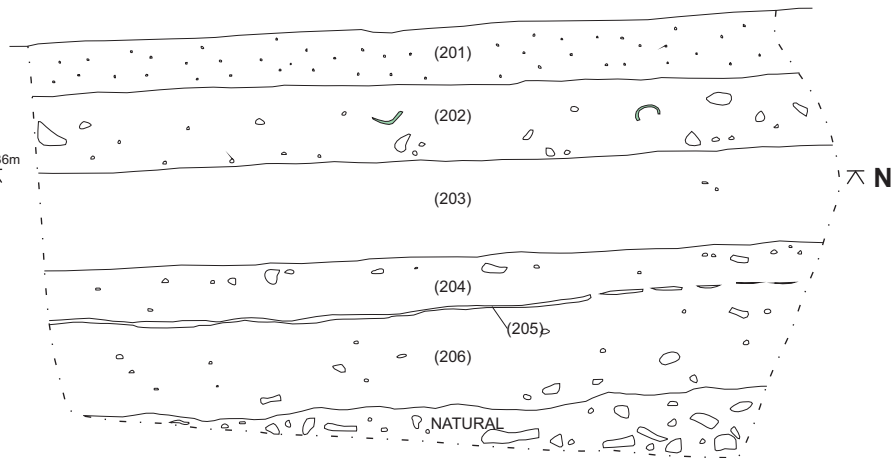
WEST FACING SECTION OF TEST PIT 1

↖ S

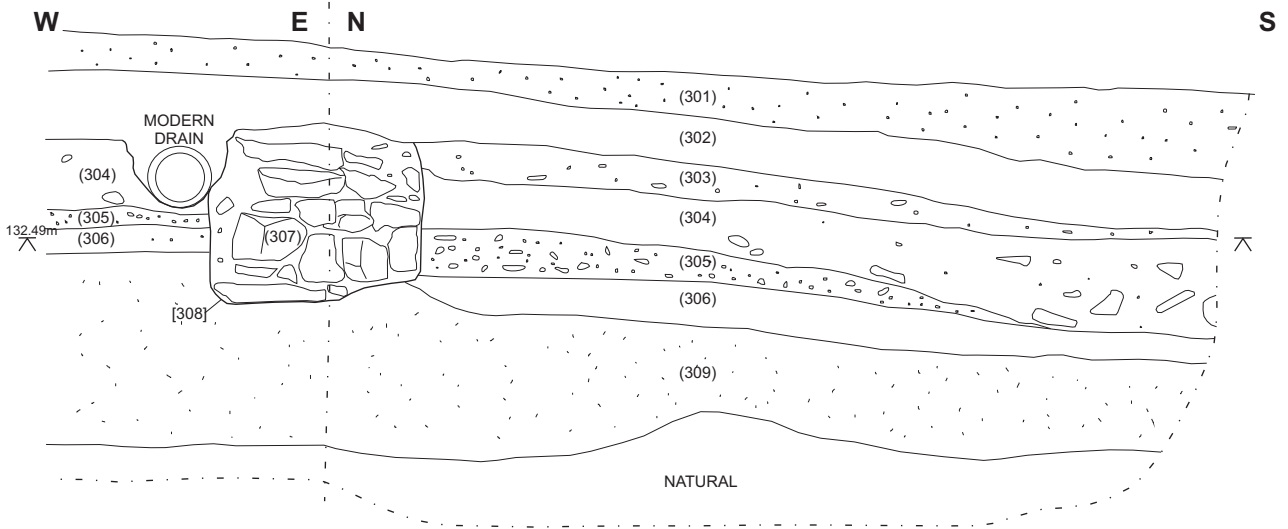


EAST FACING SECTION OF TEST PIT 2

133.36m
S ↗



SOUTH AND WEST FACING SECTIONS OF TEST PIT 3



KEY	
■	GLASS
#	CHARCOAL



FIGURE 4 : Test Pit Sections