

Ambrey Archaeology Ltd

Archaeological evaluation of land to the rear of 31-33 High St., Persnore, Worcestershire

Tom Rogers

With a contribution by Rob Hedge

Version 1

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Ambrey Archaeology on land to the rear of at 31-33 High Street, Pershore, Worcestershire. The works were commissioned by Michael Hodges of Broadway Heritage Ltd whose clients have been granted planning permission from Wychavon District Council for commercial and residential re-use of 31 and 33 High Street to create 2 no. retail units and 4 no. flats and erection of 3 no. new build cottages on land to the rear, with associated landscaping.

The application was accompanied by a Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by Elmwood Heritage. This noted the site is within the medieval core of Pershore. In line with local and national guidance permission was granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological work.

Consultation with Wychavon District Council established that this should comprise a historic building recording and a programme of trial trenching. This document describes the results of the archaeological evaluation.

The building is located on the eastern side of the High Street about 100m north of Broad Street and 150m east of Pershore Abbey. The long, narrow shape of the holding reflects its origin as a burgage plot.

Medieval Pershore was divided into the two parishes of Holy Cross and St Andrew's, a division which reflected the manorial holdings of the Abbey of Pershore and the Abbey of Westminster. The right to establish a borough was granted by King Edward to the abbot of Westminster in 1065, and in the Domesday survey a total of 28 burgesses are recorded. The Abbot of Pershore's part of the town was High Street, where excavation shows occupation commenced in the late 11th or 12th century.

The field survey was undertaken in July 2025. The intention was to open three trenches, each 10m long and 1.6m long in the footprints of the proposed houses, however due to a considerable depth of subsoil and the proximity of a wall adjacent to an area used by articulated lorries, one trench could not be fully opened.

The evaluation revealed three features: Closest to the street frontage was a probable elongated pit containing a quantity of tile and a Malvernian rim sherd dated to the 15th- 16th centuries. Slightly to the east was a brick lined well, thought to be 19th or 20th century in date and to the east of this, a relatively modern refuse pit.

The pattern of backplot activity is typical of an urban burgage plot which would have been used for deposition of domestic waste and other activities over a long period of time. Similar activity has been recorded in archaeological interventions in the plots either side of the site.

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1. Background

This document describes the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out by Ambrey Archaeology on land to the rear of 31-33 High Street, Pershore, Worcestershire (NGR 394954 245857). The works were commissioned by Michael Hodges of Broadway Heritage Ltd whose clients have been granted planning permission from Wychavon District Council (WDC) for commercial and residential re-use of 31 and 33 High Street to create 2 no. retail units and 4 no. flats and erection of 3 no. new build cottages on land to the rear, with associated landscaping, planning reference [25/00085/FUL; 25/00086/LB].

The application was accompanied by a Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by Elmwood Heritage. This noted that 31-33 High Street is Grade II listed with the earliest fabric dating to the 16th century which stands within the medieval core of Pershore.

In line with local and national guidance permission was granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological work.

Consultation with Aidan Smyth, Archaeology and Planning Advisor to WDC (dated 12th February 2025), established that this should comprise a historic building recording and a programme of trial trenching. This document describes the results of the archaeological evaluation. The results of the Historic Building Recording are set out in a separate document.

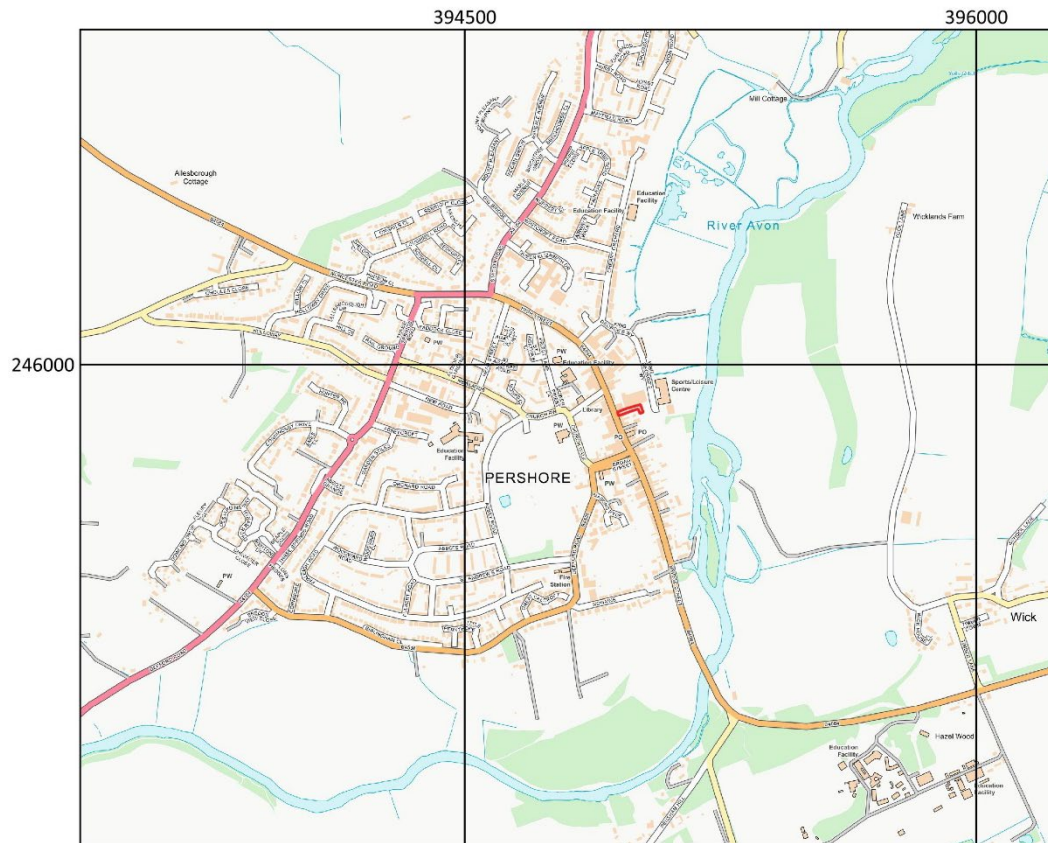
Prior to works a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) setting out a methodology and framework for the proposed works was produced by Ambrey Archaeology (Ambrey Archaeology 2025) and approved by WDC.

2. Aims

The Chartered Institute for Archaeology (CIfA 2023a) notes that an archaeological field evaluation will seek to determine, record and report on the nature, extent, preservation and significance of archaeological remains within a defined area. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts.

3. Site location and topography

The site, comprising the buildings 31 and 33 High Street and plot to the rear, is located at NGR 394954 245857 on the eastern side of High Street about 100m north of the Broad Street and 150m east of Pershore Abbey (Figures 1 and 2). The building stands in a row of buildings of differing styles and heights, the majority of which function as shops or offices. The ground to the rear is a narrow L shaped plot stretching about 45m to the east to the rear of which is a Youth Centre and beyond that, the River Avon.



*Figure 1. Site location
(base mapping (2025) Ordnance Survey Open Map)*

The site, including the existing buildings and the yard to the rear comprises an area of about 940m².

Bedrock at the site is Charmouth mudstone formation with superficial deposits of Wasperton sand and gravel mapped (BGS, 2025).

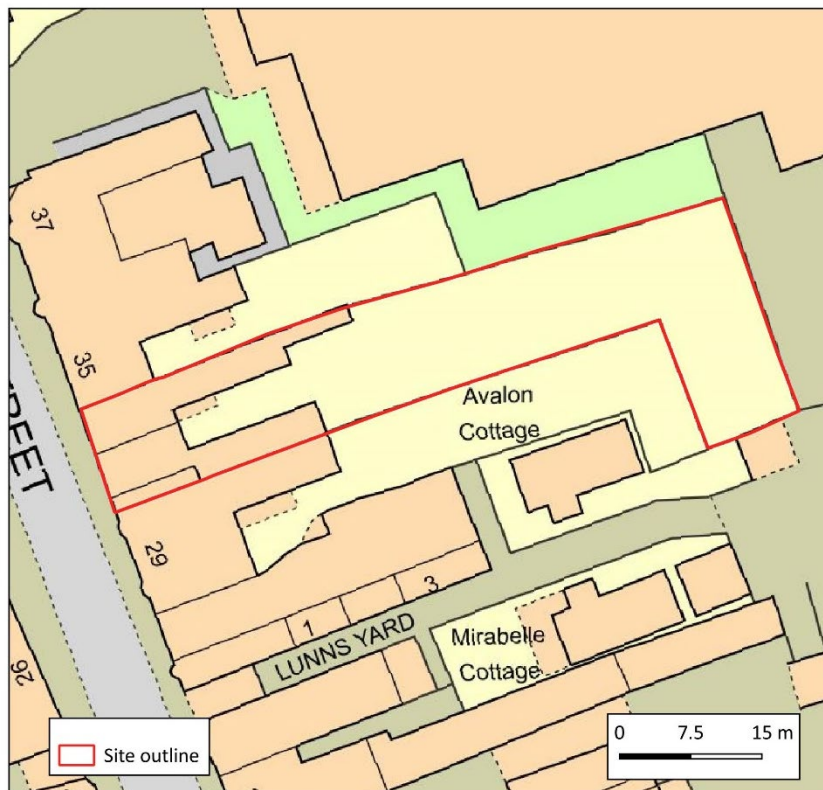


Figure 2. Site outline
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4. Archaeological context

The site lies within an area of Palaeolithic potential (WSM56946) as it lies on Wasperton sands and gravels from which artefacts and ecofacts dating to Marione Isotope stages 04-02 have been recovered.

A Flandrian River channel was excavated in 1978 ahead of the development of central Pershore (WSM11870). A series of deposits up to 4m thick were recorded, which included mammal remains from Marione Isotope Stages 3-2, Neolithic, Iron Age, Roman, Medieval and post medieval artefacts.

Apart from that found in the river channel, there is no evidence of Roman occupation within the search area, although Dalwood and Buteaux (1995) record that buried deposits containing Roman ceramics of this date have been excavated in Newlands, to the north-west of the PDA.

The location of the site on gravels close to the River Avon is likely to have attracted settlement in the late prehistoric and Roman periods as activity from these periods is well attested along the line of the river including at Three Springs Road in Pershore where Iron Age and Romano- British activity was recorded in an excavation ahead of residential development in 2011 (Worcestershire Archaeology 2013).

A minster church was founded in the town c689 but there is little evidence of the life of the community until it was reconstituted as the Benedictine abbey of St Mary and St Eadburga in c 970 (WSM05407). It is probable that a rural settlement grew up at the gate of the abbey, north of the

church (WSM16050). It has also been suggested that there was a mint at Pershore in the mid-11th century (WSM15710).

In 1065 King Edward granted many of the estates of Pershore abbey to the new abbey of Westminster, including half the estate of Pershore itself (Dalwood and Buteaux 1995). The right to establish a borough was granted by King Edward to the abbot of Westminster in 1065, and in Domesday Book a total of 28 burgesses are recorded. The Abbot of Pershore's part of the town was High Street, where excavation shows occupation commenced in the late 11th or 12th century and Newlands where a new suburb was laid out by the 13th century. This area is likely to include the site and likely comprises a series of long narrow burgage plots with frontages to the High Street. Tenement blocks to the east of High Street are recorded on the HER as WSM16060. Stone built vaults are recorded as surviving beneath 21 to 23 High Street (WSM15294) that include a late 13th century piscina and are believed to be part of the chapel of St Michael.

Documentary evidence indicates that Pershore was a moderately prosperous medieval town, and its bridge and routeways gave it a certain economic importance. There was a wool trade in the town, although not on a large scale. The site of a wool barn is marked on the HER to the south of the site (WSM58519). The town was burnt down twice in the 13th century which may have led to replanning of large areas of the town including the laying out of Broad Street (*ibid*).

The town was in decline towards the end of the medieval period. Following its dissolution in 1539 most of the abbey precinct became a private house and Pershore grounds.

Recorded trades in the 17th century included gloving (probably the major industry), other leatherworking crafts, tanning, and silkweaving. Orchard and market-garden cultivation were a feature of the 19th century economy. The railway reached Defford in 1840, and Pershore in 1853.

World War II assets recorded in the search area comprise two three air raid shelters (WSM27358, WSM27359 and WSM22892) although Robson-Glyde (2023) notes that the High Street was used as the headquarters of the Evesham Battalion LDV and later by the 4th Worcestershire Battalion Home Guard.

The Plaza Cinema (WSM71553) which operated from the 1920s to demolition in 1969 was located on the High Street some 50m south of the site.

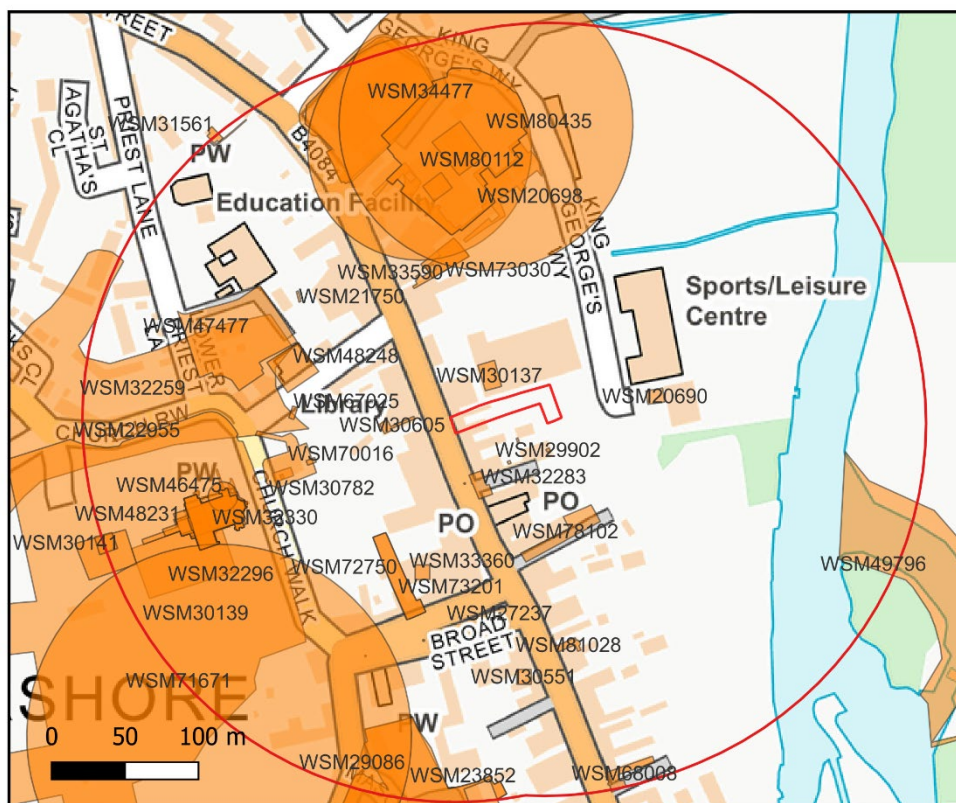


Figure 3. Selected monuments within the search area

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4.1 Archaeological events in the vicinity

A total of 61 archaeological interventions are recorded within the Study Area. Those most relevant to the site and proposed works are described below.

An excavation was undertaken to the Rear of 37 High Street immediately to the north of the site in 1992 by Birmingham Archaeology (WSM30137). Here a number of intercutting medieval and early post-medieval pits were exposed. Several of the features may have been post-holes associated with early timber structures and several of the pits were sealed by the remnants of a wall composed of stone slabs possibly of late medieval - early post-medieval date. Evidence of post medieval tanning comprised two brick-built basements, to the west of which were a series of clay-lined tanning pits.

An evaluation was undertaken in advance of the proposed construction of a new shopping arcade and flats by Worcestershire County Council Archaeology Service in 1994 (WSM29902) in the plot to the south of the site. The proposed works lay immediately to the east of the surviving undercroft of a suspected medieval chapel (WSM15293). The site encompassed a substantial area including parts of at least four medieval burgrave plots. The earliest deposits identified dated to the 13th-14th centuries and occupation has been continuous since that time. The deposits were typical of back-plot locations, being principally associated with waste disposal, but also including evidence of commercial activity in the form of a substantial medieval oven.

An archaeological excavation was undertaken at 34 (The Old Post Office) High Street, Pershore on the west side of High Street by Marches Archaeology in 2003 (WSM30605).

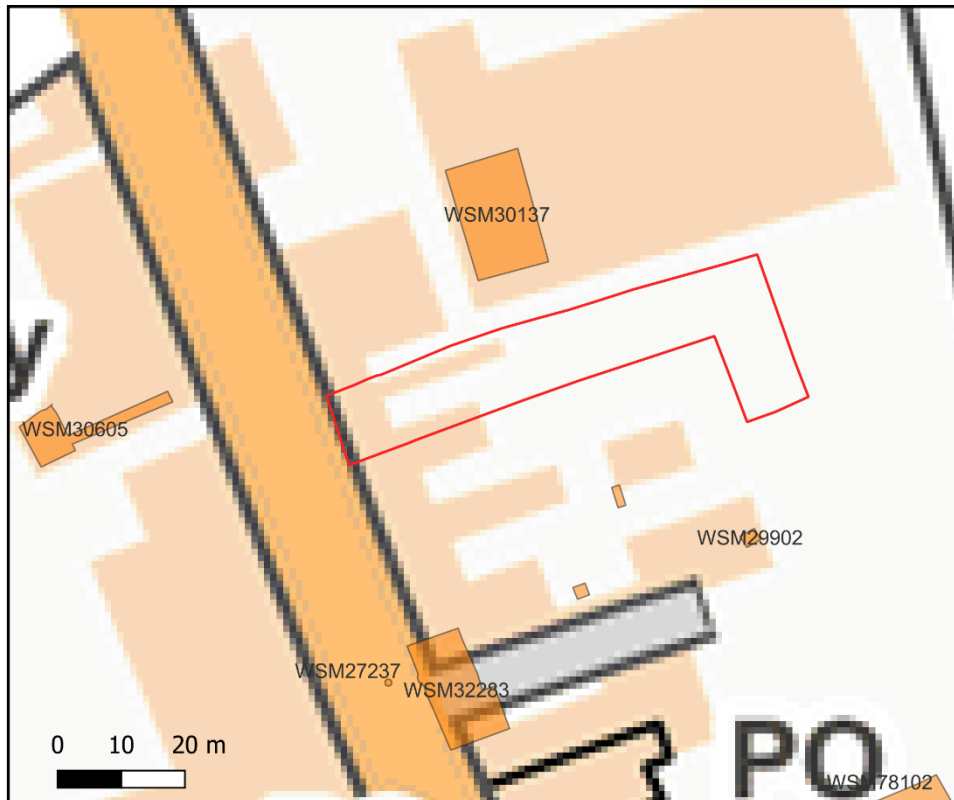


Figure 4. Archaeological events in the vicinity to the site

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The earliest features consisted mainly of pits and postholes which were either cutting the natural or layers that directly overlay the natural subsoil. Medieval features included two probable gullies, pits, potholes and a stone lined well. The post-medieval phase was characterised by domestic and industrial features. These included a possible well and a small building complex housing a hearth.

Assessment of proposed re sewerage works, Pershore (WSM27237) was undertaken in The High Street and Bridge Street in 1998. The fieldwork consisted of the observation of four boreholes of which one demonstrated that undated, waterlogged, organic-rich deposits survive beneath the High Street.

5. Methods

5.1 Fieldwork

The evaluation was carried out by Elizabeth Connolly MA ACIfA and Tom Rogers MSc MCIfA following *Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological Projects in Worcestershire*.

The field survey was undertaken on 17th July 2025 in bright, warm weather. The intention was to open three trenches, each 10m long and 1.6m long in the footprints of the proposed houses. The locations of the trenches were set out using triangulation from known fixed structures. Prior to excavation, the locations of the trenches were scanned using a Cable Awareness Tool to ensure that no live services were present.

Initial excavation of the trenches (removal of topsoil and subsoil) was carried out using a tracked mechanical excavator supplied by the client. It was fitted with a toothless bucket and excavations were undertaken under archaeological supervision. The locations of the proposed trenches are shown in Figure 5.

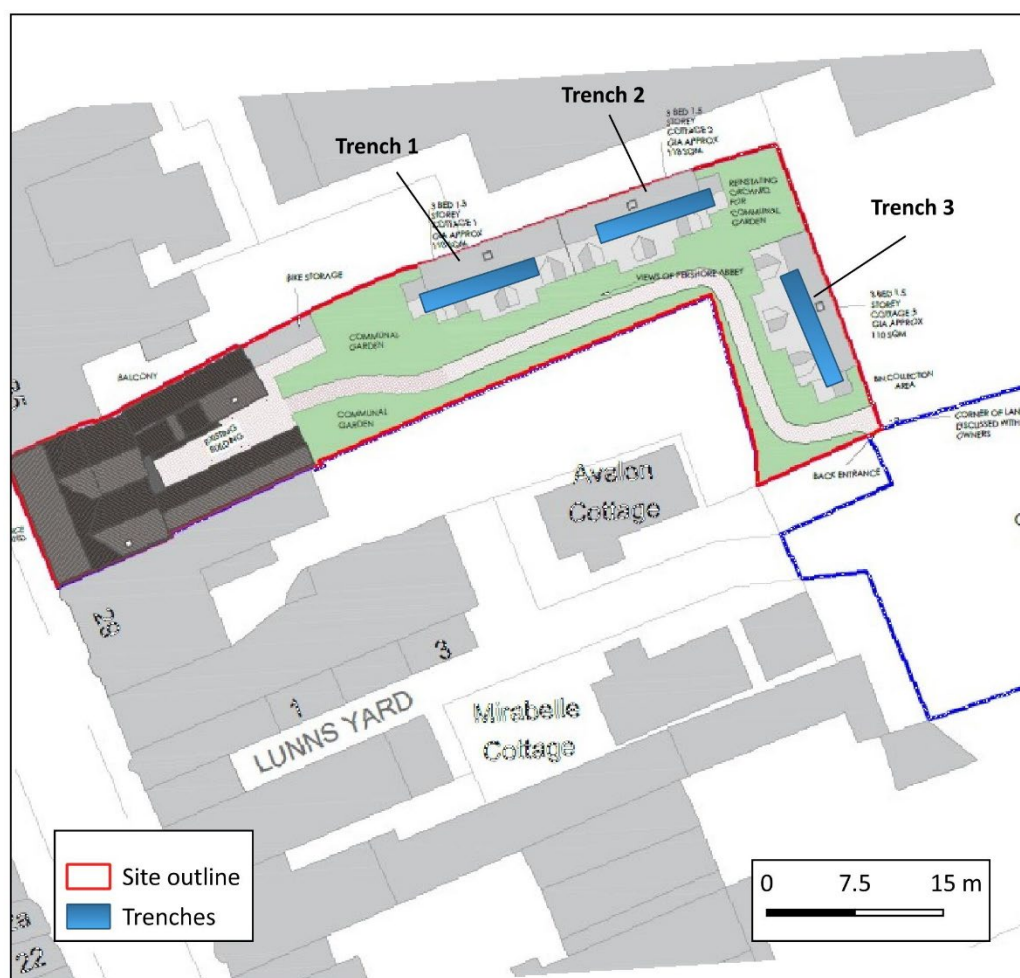


Figure 5. Intended locations of trenches

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Trench 1 was opened in the intended location, however the excavation of Trench 2 uncovered a bees nest in the central part of the trench. With the approval of Aidan Smyth this area was left, and a compensatory length was added to the eastern end of the trench to make a total of 12m.

Furthermore, on excavation of the southern end of Trench 3, it was found that the natural substrate was more than a metre below the ground surface. As the trench was adjacent to a tall brick wall bordering an area used by articulated lorries to deliver to a supermarket, it was considered that, in consideration of the loose nature of the topsoil, the risk of undermining the wall was too great to continue. This pit was labelled 3a.

With the approval of Aidan Smyth, a test pit (3b) was dug at the northern end of the trench, with a narrower bucket, but it was found that the depth of the substrate was slightly shallow but still deep in this location. The nature of the deposits was briefly recorded and the two areas were backfilled.

The locations of the trenches as dug, are shown in Figure 6.

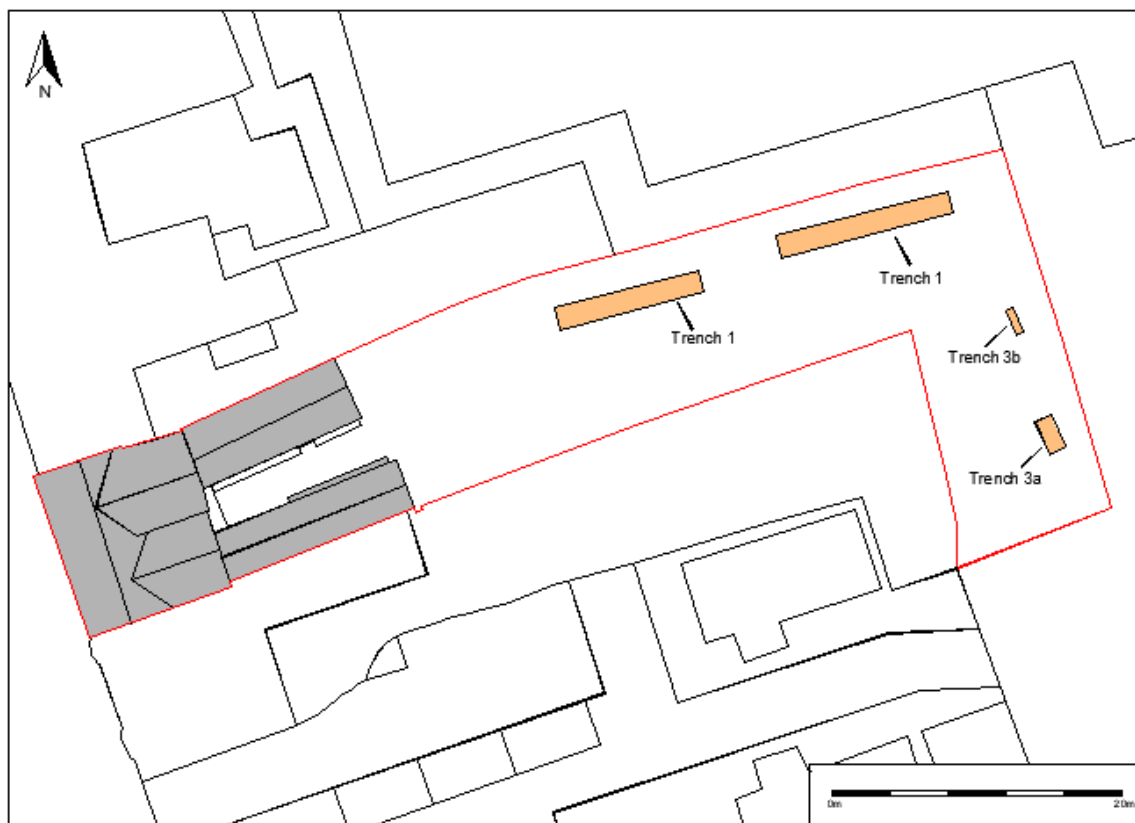


Figure 6 Trench locations as excavated

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Trenches 1 and 2 were cleaned by hand and sections were excavated through the features uncovered. Context recording was undertaken using context sheets and other pro-forma recording sheets and photographs were taken with a Nikon D3200 SLR camera. Plans and sections of trenches and features were drawn on permatrace at 1:10 and 1:20 scales.

On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

5.2 Post excavation works

Following excavation, all context sheets were checked and cross referenced. Survey material was downloaded and processed using QGIS 3.16 Hannover and AutoCAD LT 2023.

Provision has been made to upload the digital archive of the project via OASIS (OASIS Id: ambreyar2-536040).

6. Results Stratigraphic results

In **Trench 1** (Plate 1, Figure 7) topsoil (101) was a loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting and charcoal flecks, moderate small pebbles and modern ceramic building material present to a depth of 0.26m. Beneath this, the subsoil (102) comprised a compact, greyish brown silty sand with frequent patches of gravel and ceramic building material and charcoal flecks present to a depth of 0.63m to the west and 0.8m to the east of the trench. This overlay the natural substrate (103), which was a compact orange/yellow sandy clay with frequent rounded pebbles and occasional patches of blue clay.

Approximately 3m from the western end of the trench a feature [105] crossed the trench on a north-south orientation (Plates 2 and 3). It was filled by (104); a hard, mottled yellow/brown clay with frequent fragments of tile and lumps of charcoal. It was cut from the interface between topsoil and subsoil and was 1.4m wide and 0.7m deep. A section revealed a profile with a sharp break of slope at the top, steep sides and irregular base which rose slightly to the north.

Slightly to the east of this, a small brick structure (106, Plate 4) comprising unfrosted bricks set at a right angle and bonded with a lime mortar is interpreted as the foundation of a building or small garden feature which continued beyond the northern edge of the trench.

At its eastern end the trench cut into a circular brick well (107, Plates 5 and 6). This had an internal diameter of 0.55m and was formed of unfrosted imperial bricks, some set as headers and others as stretchers and was capped with a thin stone slab. Eleven courses of brick were evident, below which the well was filled with silt. A ceramic pipe joined the well from the north three courses from the base.

Trench 2 (Plate 7, Figure 8) was 12m long due to the presence of a bees nest in the centre. As in Trench 1, topsoil (201) was a loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting and charcoal flecks, moderate small pebbles and modern ceramic building material. At the western end of the trench the subsoil (202) was present to a depth of 0.4m deep whereas to the east, the interface with the natural substrate (203, same as 103) was at 0.7m below ground surface.

At the western end of the trench a shallow sub oval pit ([205], Plate 8) protruded into the trench from the northern baulk. It was 0.8m long from east to west and 0.5m wide, although it extended north of the trench. It was filled by (204), a loose dark grey silty sand with modern pottery, metal and ceramic building material and is interpreted as a relatively modern refuse pit.

Trench 3a (Plate 9), at the southern end of the intended trench was 4m long at the top and 1.2m wide (excavated with a narrower bucket). Here topsoil (301), a loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting and charcoal flecks, moderate small pebbles and modern ceramic building material was present to a depth of 0.3m while the subsoil (302) continued to a depth of 1.1m, below which the natural substrate (303) was revealed in a small area before the trench was backfilled.

A similar profile was revealed in **Trench 3b** (Plate 10) although here the natural substrate was at a depth of 0.9m.

7. Assessment of Artefacts by Rob Hedge

7.1 Introduction

This assessment aims to quantify, spot-date and sort artefacts according to type, to describe their range and significance, and to make recommendations for further analysis.

The project conforms to standards and guidance issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014) and CIfA's Toolkit for Specialist Reporting (2022), as well as further guidance on analysis, archive creation and museum deposition created by the Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF 2011), and the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA 1993, 2020).

7.2 Methodology

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A terminus post quem date was produced for each stratified context. This date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. All information was recorded digitally.

The pottery was examined under x20 magnification and referenced as appropriate by fabric type and form. Where possible, sherds have been classified according to the Worcestershire county type series (WAAS 2017).

7.3 Quantification

The assemblage comprised 12 artefacts weighing 482g.

<i>material</i>	<i>object type</i>	<i>count</i>	<i>weight(g)</i>
ceramic	brick/tile	2	31
	flat roof tile	2	285
	flat tile	1	32
	pot	4	124
glass	window	2	6
shell	oyster	1	4
Grand Total		12	482

Table 1: Quantification

The condition of the artefacts was variable: the majority were small and abraded, but the survival of a large rim sherd from (104) indicates the potential for pockets of good artefact preservation within the site.

<i>period</i>	<i>fabric group</i>	<i>fabric number</i>	count	weight(g)
late medieval / early post-medieval	Oxidised glazed Malvernian ware	69	1	62
Post-medieval	Black-glazed redware	78	1	7
	Unglazed redware	78	2	55
Grand Total			4	124

Table 2: ceramic fabric types

7.4 Analysis

Context	object type	start date	end date	count	weight (g)	TPQ date range
102	brick/tile	1600	1900	1	28	AD 1700 - 1900
	pot	1700	1900	1	43	
104	flat roof tile	1200	1700	2	285	AD 1470 - 1600
	oyster			1	4	
	pot	1470	1600	1	62	
	window	1400	1800	1	2	
204	flat tile	1900	2000	1	32	AD 1900 - 2000
	pot	1850	2000	1	12	
	window	1900	2000	1	4	
302	brick/tile	1200	1800	1	3	AD 1600 - 1800
	pot	1600	1800	1	7	

Table 3: Context dating

7.5 Discussion

Finds from context (102) were limited to a small fragment of post-medieval brick or tile, and a sherd of 18th or 19th century unglazed redware pottery.

Deposit (104) contained a small fragment of window glass, a piece of oyster shell, two fragments of flat roof tile, and a piece of Malvernian Ware pottery (fabric 69). The tile was typical of medieval or early post-medieval roof tiles in the region but cannot be closely dated. The key dating for the context came from the sherd of pottery: from the rim of a Type 7 jar or pipkin, these were produced in the Hanley area from the late-15th century, but are most commonly associated with deposits of sixteenth century date (Bryant 2004).

Context (204) contained only 20th century material.

A small sherd of glazed redware suggests a 17th or 18th century TPQ date for deposit (302).

7.6 Conclusion

This is a small assemblage, but the presence of a substantial sherd of late-15th/16th century pottery and associated building material is significant, and may pertain to the building's construction phase or early use.

The assemblage is not sufficiently large to warrant further analysis but should be taken into consideration if further work is undertaken on the site. It is not considered a high priority for accession by Museums Worcestershire (although the final decision rests with the Museum's curator), but could perhaps be utilised in a local display or education collection.

8. Discussion

The evaluation revealed three features: a probable 15th-16th century feature containing a quantity of tile, a relatively modern refuse pit and a well. Feature [105] may represent one section of a ditch but as the base was noticeably rising to the north, it is considered more likely to be an elongated pit. There was a slight greenish hue to the excavated sides which may suggest that it had functioned as a cess pit at some point, but the fill was clearly not derived from organic material with no discernible layers, suggesting that it was backfilled in one event, possibly at a time when the building was being re-roofed or an extension added which would account for the quantity of tile. It is dated by a single rim sherd to the 15th or 16th centuries which would have been the period when the earliest part of 31-33 High Street was constructed and then extended to the rear (Ambrey Archaeology 2025b). However it cannot be discounted that the sherd was residual in that context.

The well is clearly a lot later and may relate to outbuildings which formerly stood here, perhaps a laundry. The ceramic pipe which joins from the north is probably of 19th or 20th century date. Pumps are marked within the plot on the 1903 25 inch map (Ambrey Archaeology 2025b), but these are closer to the house, although pipework may have allowed the well to be used from a distance.

The pattern of backplot activity is typical of an urban burgage plot which would have been used for deposition of domestic waste and other activities over a long period of time. An excavation in the plot immediately to the north (WSM30137) revealed a series of intercutting medieval and early post-medieval pits, post-holes associated with early timber structures, the remnants of a wall and evidence of tanning. Investigations to the south (WSM29902) revealed evidence of activity from the 14th century onwards, including an oven.

It is notable that the depth of deposits overlying the natural substrate increases to the east of the plot. This probably reflects a natural slope in the natural gravels towards the river 130m to the east which has been levelled out by the deposition of materials over a long period of time. This is likely to have comprised a combination of domestic waste and cess. It is probable that the privy was placed at the far end of the garden.

9. Acknowledgements

Ambrey Archaeology would like to thank the following for their help with this project: Michael Hodges of Broadway Heritage Ltd for commissioning the works, providing access to the building and plant and Aidan Smyth of WDC for monitoring the project.

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Figures

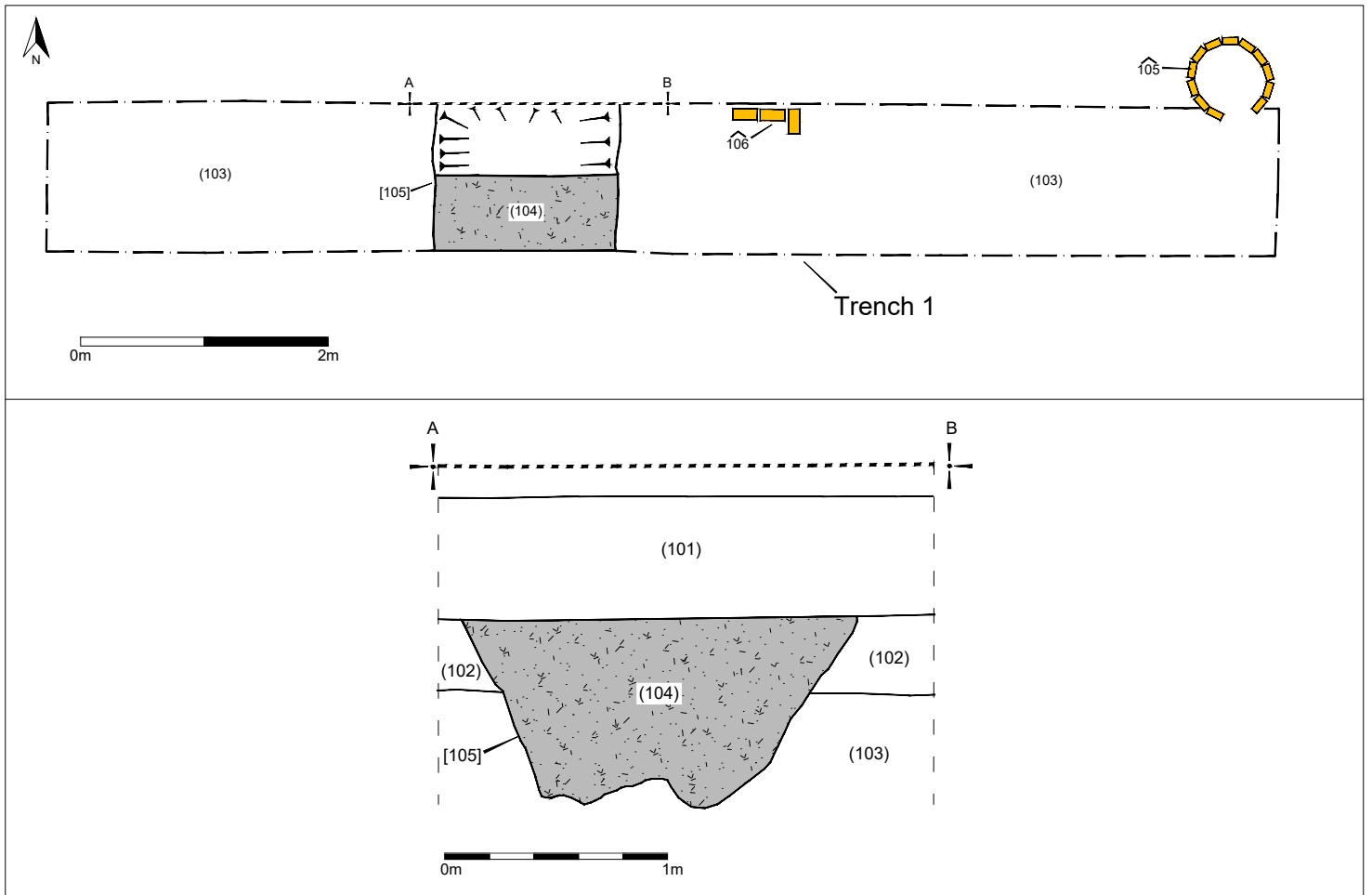


Figure 7. Plan of Trench 1 with excavated section of [105]

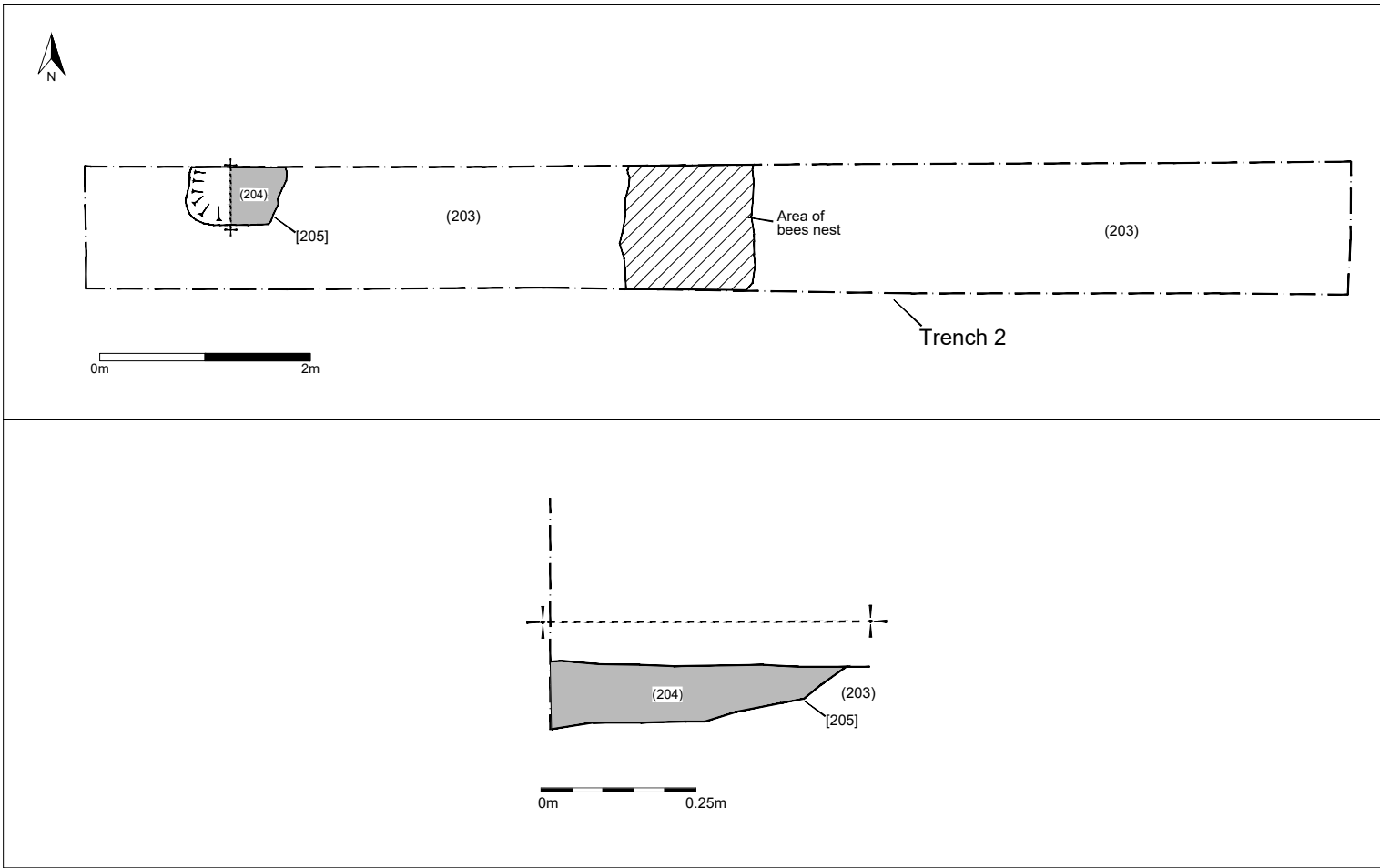


Figure 8. Plan of Trench 2 with excavated section of [205]

Plates



Plate 1. Trench 1, view west, scales 1m



Plate 2. Feature [105], view WNW



Plate 3. Feature [105], view north



Plate 4. Feature 106, view north, scale 0.4m



Plate 5. External view of well (107) in northern baulk of Trench 1, view north, scale 0.5m



Plate 6. Internal view of well (107)



Plate 7. Trench 2, view west



Plate 8. Feature [205] view NNE, scales 0.5m and 0.2m



Plate 9. Trench 3a, view north-west



Plate 10. Trench 1b, view north

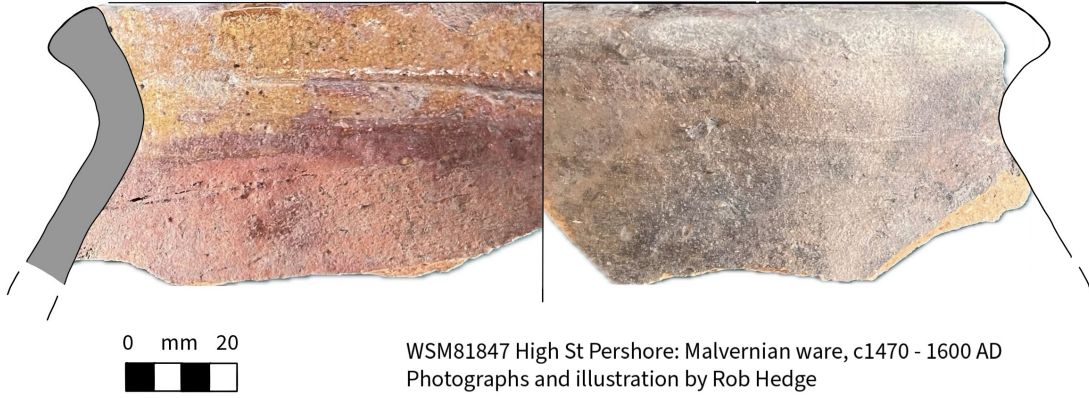


Plate 11. Rim sherd from context {104}

Appendix 1 Context descriptions

Trench 1: Length: 10.4m; Width: 1.6m; Maximum depth: 08m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
101	0.0 – 0.26m	Loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting and charcoal flecks, moderate small pebbles and modern ceramic building material	Topsoil/garden soil
102	0.2 – 0.63m	Compact greyish brown silty sand with frequent patches of gravel and ceramic building material and charcoal flecks.	Subsoil
103	0.63 – 0.8m+	Compact orange/yellow sandy clay with frequent rounded pebbles and occasional patches of blue clay	Natural substrate
104	0.5m – 1.2m	Hard, mottled yellow/brown clay with frequent fragments of tile and lumps of charcoal	Fill of [105]
105	0.5m – 1.2m	Probable linear feature crossing trench from north to south, Cuts both subsoil and natural substrate. 1.4m wide and 0.75m deep. Profile shows sharp break of slope at top, steep sides and irregular base which rises to the north.	Cut of linear feature
106	0.63m – 0.78m	Base of small brick structure at base of subsoil, probably continuing beyond the northern bank of trench	Foundation of structure
107	0.4m	Circular well with an internal diameter of approximately 0.55m. formed of unfrosted imperial bricks some set as headers and others stretchers with stone cap. Eleven courses evident, below which the well is filled with silt. A ceramic pipe joins from the north three courses from the base.	Well

Trench 2: Length: 12m; Width: 1.6m; Maximum depth: 0.9m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
201	0.0-0.3m (west) 0.0 – 0.5m (east)	Loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting and charcoal flecks, moderate small pebbles and modern ceramic building material	Topsoil/garden soil
202	0.3 – 0.4m (west) 0.5 - 0.7m (east)	Compact greyish brown silty sand with frequent patches of gravel and ceramic building material and charcoal flecks.	Subsoil
203	0.4m (west) (0.7m east)	Compact buff clay with moderate gravel	Natural substrate
204	0.7 – 0.9m	Loose dark grey silty sand with modern pottery, metal and ceramic building material	Fill of [205]
205	0.4m – 0.7m	Shallow sub oval pit 0.8m long (east to west) and 0.5m (north to south) although continues beyond northern baulk	Small refuse pit

Trench 3a: Length: 4m; Width: 1.2m; Maximum depth: 1.2m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
201	0.0-0.3m	Loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting and charcoal flecks, moderate small pebbles and modern ceramic building material	Topsoil/garden soil
202	0.3 – 1.1m	Compact greyish brown silty sand with frequent patches of gravel and frequent ceramic building material and charcoal flecks.	Subsoil
203	1.2m+	Compact buff clay with moderate gravel	Natural substrate

Trench 3b: Length: 1.7m; Width: 1.2m; Maximum depth: 1.2m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
201	0.0-0.3m	Loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting and charcoal flecks, moderate small pebbles and ceramic building material	Topsoil/garden soil
202	0.3 – 0.9m	Compact greyish brown silty sand with frequent patches of gravel and frequent ceramic building material and charcoal flecks.	Subsoil
203	0.9m+	Compact buff clay with moderate gravel	Natural substrate