

**Land to the rear of 7 and 7a, High Street,
Banbury, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Flitterman Investments Ltd**

by Danielle Milbank

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code HBA 08/120

November 2008

Summary

Site name: Land to the rear of 7 and 7a, High Street, Banbury, Oxford

Grid reference: SP 4565 4052

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 5th November 2008

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Danielle Milbank

Site code: HBA 08/120

Area of site: *c.* 0.2 ha

Summary of results: The foundations of late 19th-/early 20th-century buildings were the only cut features recorded. Two sherds of medieval pottery and one post-medieval sherd were also recovered.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

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	Steve Preston ✓ 19.11.08

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Report 08/120

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on land to the rear of 7 and 7a, High Street, Banbury, Oxfordshire (SP 4565 4052) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Andrew Thomas of Cumming Anderton Architects, 38 The Green, South Bar, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX16 9AE on behalf of Flitterman Investments Ltd, 75a Dartmouth Road, London, NW2 4EP.

Planning permission (app no. 08/01968/F) has been sought from Cherwell District Council to develop the site with the construction of a new 2- and 3-storey office building and service yard. As a consequence of the possibility of any archaeological remains surviving on the site which may be damaged or destroyed by groundworks, a field evaluation has been requested, in order to inform the planning process.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, advisers to the district on matters relating to archaeology.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Milbank and Tim Dawson on 5th November 2008, and the site code is HBA 08/120. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and it is anticipated that it will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the south of the High Street, on the north side of George Street (Fig. 2). The site is currently an area of rough ground and a car park/service yard for premises on the High Street. The site lies in the centre of the town, c. 400m west of the Oxford Canal and the river Cherwell. The underlying geology of the site is Lower Lias clay, with alluvial deposits overlying this in some areas (BGS 1982). The Lower Lias was encountered in parts of the excavated trench in the form of firm plastic slightly mottled yellow grey clay. Overall the site is fairly flat, and lies at a height of 94.5m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief provided by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (Oram 2008). In summary, the site is located in an area of archaeological potential within the historical (medieval) core of Banbury (Munby *et al.* 1975). The site fronts onto George Street which was part of the medieval layout of the town (then called Scalding Lane). Documentary records show that this street once had an early workhouse on it, which was moved in the 17th century. It is possible that Scalding Lane had medieval houses fronting the street, but it is not until the 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps that a series of houses along the street are shown. There was also an inn on the current site, the Red Lion Tap, which was known to have existed by at least AD1800.

An excavation carried out on the opposite side of George Street, has produced evidence for medieval settlement in the form of pits, gullies and postholes which were likely to represent activity at the rear of house plots fronting Scalding Lane.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. The specific research aims of the project were:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site;
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
- to determine if medieval occupation deposits are present on the site;
- to determine if any deposits relating to a medieval or early post-medieval inn are present on the site.

It was proposed to dig one trench, 20m long and 1.6m wide, positioned to target the footprint of the proposed office building. The trench was to be dug by a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. The spoil was to be monitored for finds and the trench cleaned by hand where necessary. Sufficient of any archaeological features and deposits revealed were to be excavated so as to satisfy the aims of the evaluation. This work was to be carried out in a manner which would not compromise the integrity of any deposits that might warrant preservation *in situ* or might be better investigated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

Results

The single trench was aligned SSW–NNE and was 18m long (Figs 3–5, Pls 1 and 2). Overall the trench was 0.53m deep, with a test pit excavated at the NNE end dug to a depth of 1.15m. The trench was stepped up where three large concrete plinths were encountered, with the top surface at a level of 94.3m AOD.

The overall stratigraphy consisted of mixed gravel and topsoil (comprising the surface of the rough ground part of the site) 0.02m to 0.05m thick, overlying 54, a mixed demolition rubble layer comprising crushed concrete and brick, which varied from 0.07m to 0.25m thick overall. This in turn overlay a slightly brown grey silty clay layer (51) which was 0.27m to 0.45m thick and contained occasional small brick/tile fragments (modern in appearance). This in turn overlay the slightly mottled, slightly grey yellow clay which comprised the natural geology in this area. The brown grey silty clay layer (51) also overlay brick wall remains (6, 7) and concrete wall foundation (4).

A test pit was excavated at the NNE end to a depth of 1.15m, which found that here, the grey brown clay was 0.30m thick and overlay a (slightly reddish) grey brown silty clay, which was 0.40m thick and overlay the yellow clay natural geology. The lower level of the natural clay in this area appeared to be the result of a truncation, though there was no cut visible in section. A stoneware jug base was recovered from context 51 within the test pit area at the NNE.

At the SSW end of the trench, the presence of a modern brick plinth limited the depth of the trench to 0.24m. Here, deposit 54 was exposed in the base, and comprised demolition rubble (slightly silty sand with occasional clay patches and more than 50% concrete, brick and tarmac-like fragments) and was 0.21m thick. A sample of the tarmac-like material was retained (1 fragment weighing 66g). This deposit also contained a single sherd (21g) of pottery of early medieval date, which represents a residual find.

At 1.8m from the SSW end, a brick wall 0.50m wide and constructed of red unfrosted bricks of modern size and fabric aligned east-west was observed (7), with a single-skin wall (6) of the same bricks in a stretcher bond extending to the north and aligned north-south. To the immediate north of 7 was a concrete plinth (1), with its top surface at a height of 94.3m AOD. The southern end of wall 6 was removed by the machine and it was not possible to identify whether these walls were contemporary with each other. Structures 2, 6 and 7 did not have visible construction cuts, and their relationship with deposit 52 (a mottled brown-grey, grey and yellow clay with moderate brick and occasional charcoal flecks) was not clear.

At the northern end of wall 6, a line of several large flat stones (possibly kerbstones) was observed. These were aligned east-west (parallel to 7 and perpendicular to 6) and on average were 0.30m long and 0.30m wide,

and 0.04m thick. They were roughly sub-rectangular, faced and fairly smooth, possibly worn, not bonded, although they did appear to be *in situ*. These stones overlay 57, a pale grey yellow sandy material containing small yellowish sandstone fragments, possibly a mortar layer.

To the north of layer 57 was a band of dark brown grey silty clay, 53, which contained a small fragment of modern (20th-century) tile and 1 fragment of medieval pottery weighing 8g, and which butted concrete plinth 2. To the north of this concrete plinth, the natural yellow clay geology was observed, at a height of 93.9m AOD. The natural clay was cut by a truncation aligned east-west and adjacent to a brick-and-concrete wall footing, structure 4, though the relationship was not established. This truncation (5) was infilled with brown grey silty clay (55) which was and did not contain any finds, though it contained occasional rubble inclusions and pale yellow sandy mortar patches. The relationship between wall foundation 4 and cut 5 was not clear. The bricks forming three courses of the wall were removed but seen in section, and appear to have been truncated by the third concrete plinth (3). Deposit 56 appeared to be the same deposit as 55, observed in plan to the NNE of wall 4, and comprised brown grey silty clay with occasional brick flecks and charcoal.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery collection comprised 3 sherds with a total weight of 213g. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor and Oakley 1984; Mellor 1994), as follows:

OX234: Banbury ware, late 11th – late 14th century. 2 sherds, 29g.

OXST: Westerwald stoneware. c.1590–1800. 1 sherd, 184g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 3. The fabrics are typical of sites in the region. One of the Banbury ware sherds was from the rim of a bowl, the Westerwald sherd is a complete base from a highly decorated jug typical of the tradition. The sherds are in good condition, despite all being redeposited.

Conclusion

The evaluation did not reveal any deposits pre-dating the later 19th century with just a few residual sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery recovered to indicate any earlier activity: these need not necessarily originate on the site. The evaluation trench contained evidence for at least two structures of later 19th- and 20th-

century date on the site and the earlier of these may correspond with a structure shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1881. However, the foundations revealed in the trench could not be matched with specific features shown on the map.

References

- BGS, 1982, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50 000, Sheet 201, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Mellor, M and Oakley, G, 1984, 'A summary of the key assemblages, a study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century', in T G Hassall, C E Halpin and M Mellor, 'Excavations in St Ebbe's, Oxford, 1967–1976: Part II: Post-medieval domestic tenements and the Post-Dissolution site of the Greyfriars', *Oxoniensia*, **49**, 181–211
- Mellor, M, 1994, 'Oxfordshire Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, **59**, 17–217
- Oram, R, 2008, 'Land to the rear of 7 and 7a, High Street, Banbury, Oxfordshire: design brief for archaeological field evaluation', Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, Oxford
- PPG16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at SSW end

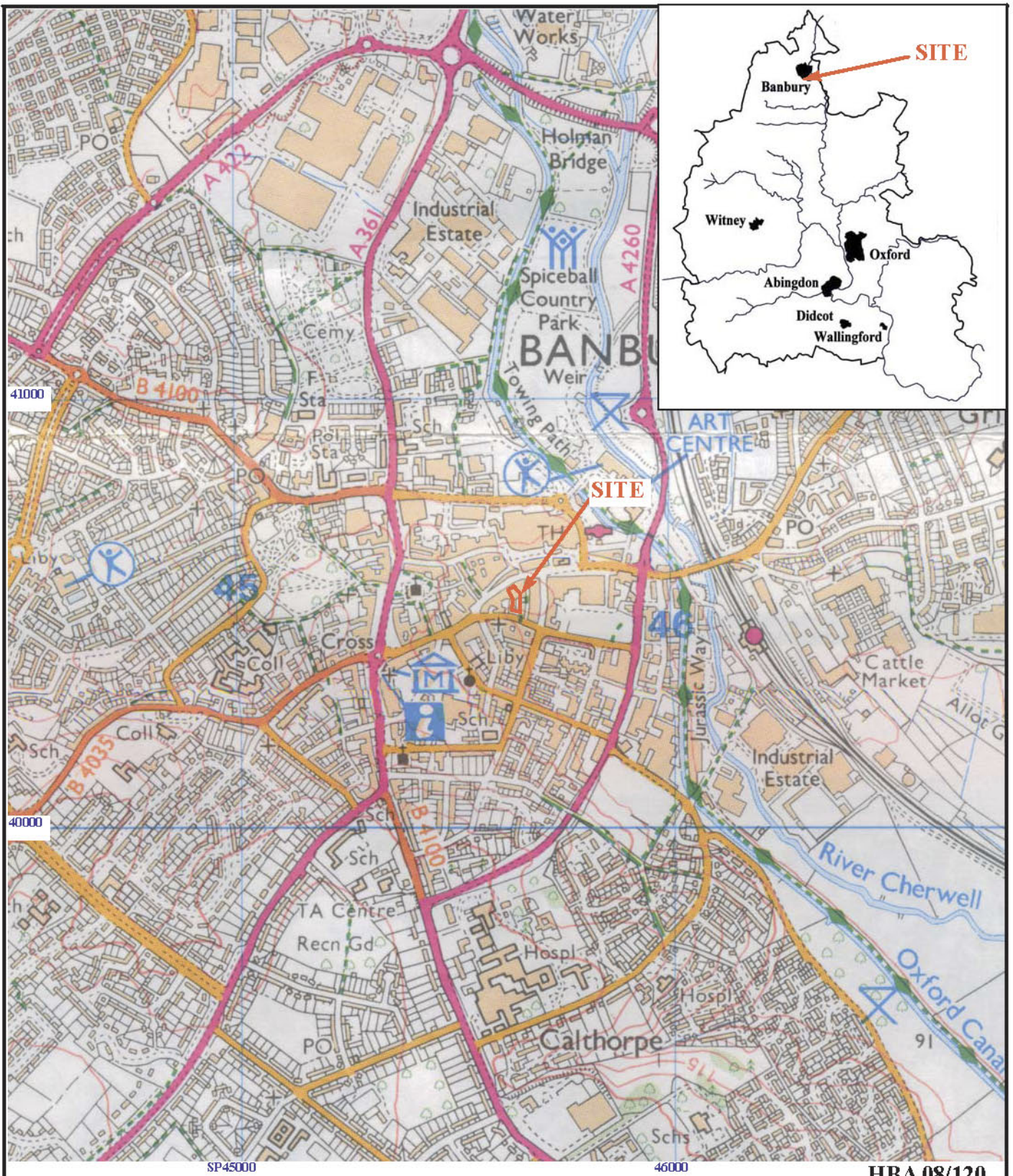
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	18.10	1.6	0.53	0.00m-0.02m gravel and topsoil; 0.02m-0.23m demolition rubble; 0.23m-0.50m brown grey silty clay; 0.50m+ yellow clay (natural geology) [Plates 1 and 2]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	5	55	truncation	Post-medieval	Rubble and mortar inclusions

APPENDIX 3: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

<i>Context</i>	<i>OX234</i>		<i>OXST</i>	
	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
51			1	184
53	1	8		
54	1	21		
Total	2	29	1	184

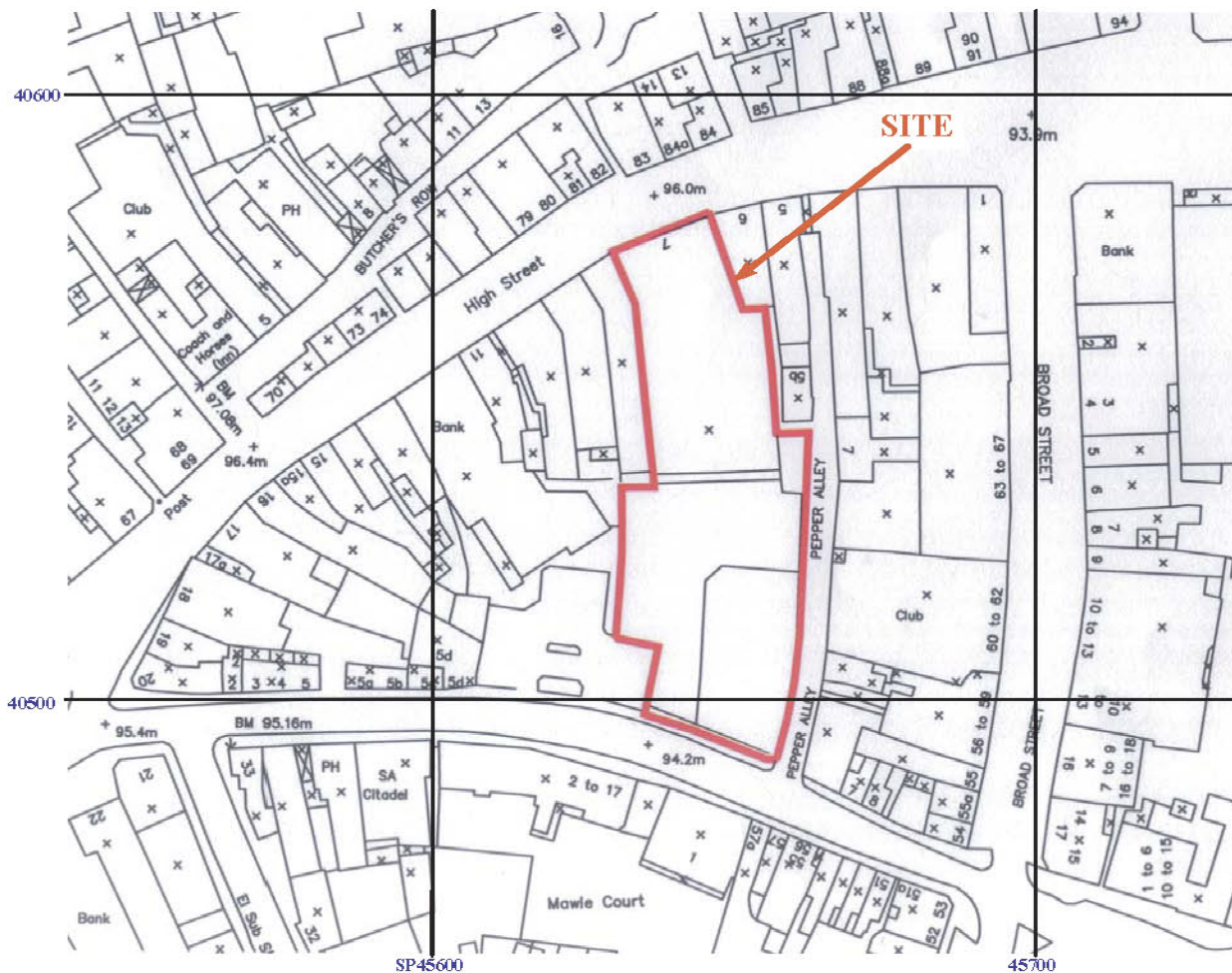


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Figure 1. Location of site within Banbury and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site between High Street and
George Street.

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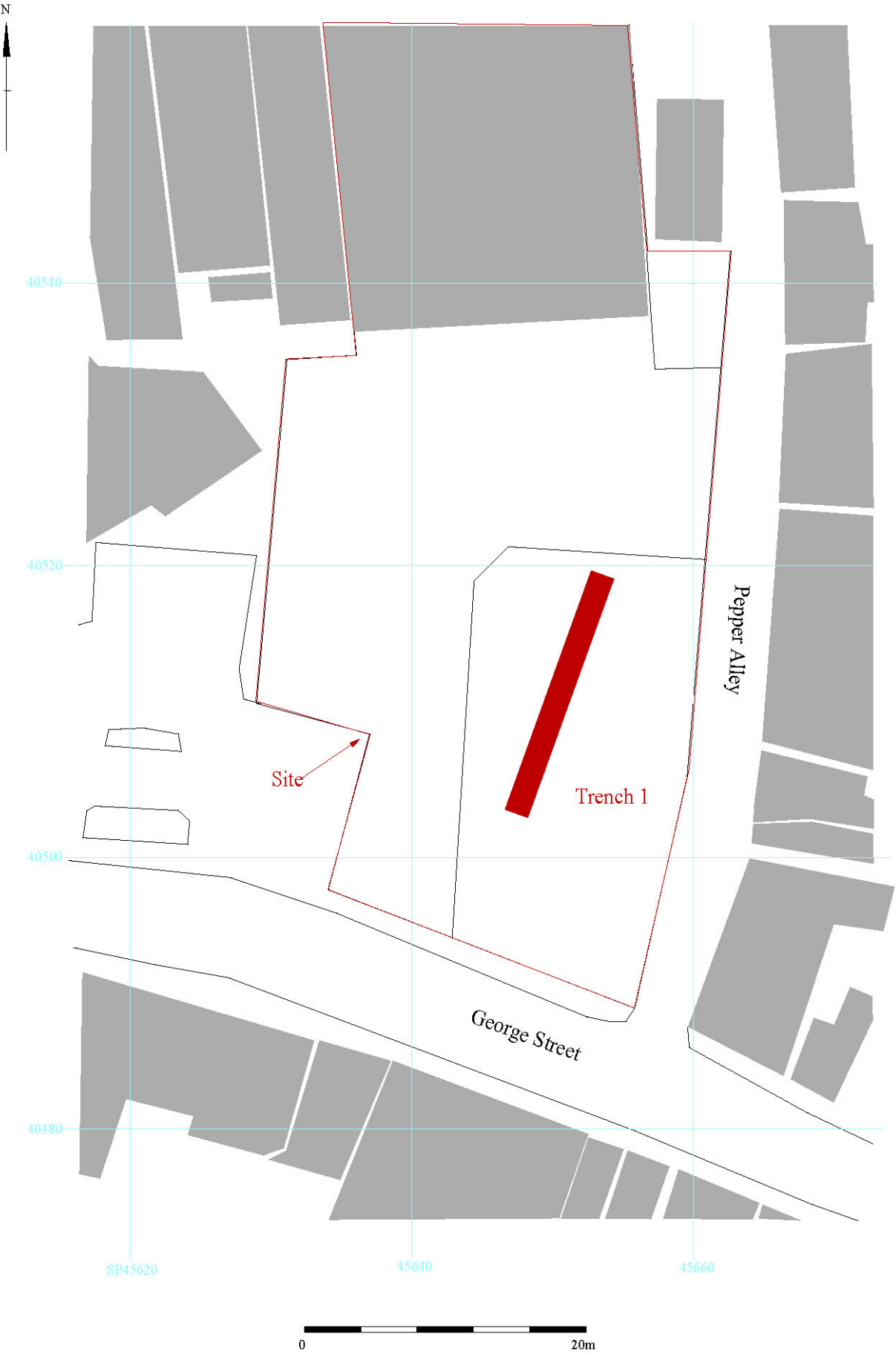


Figure 3. Location of trench within site.

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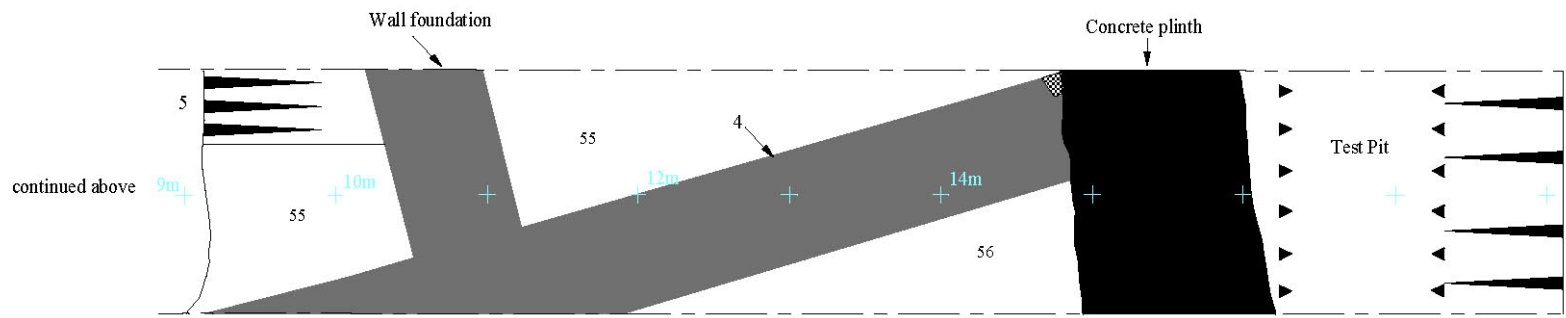
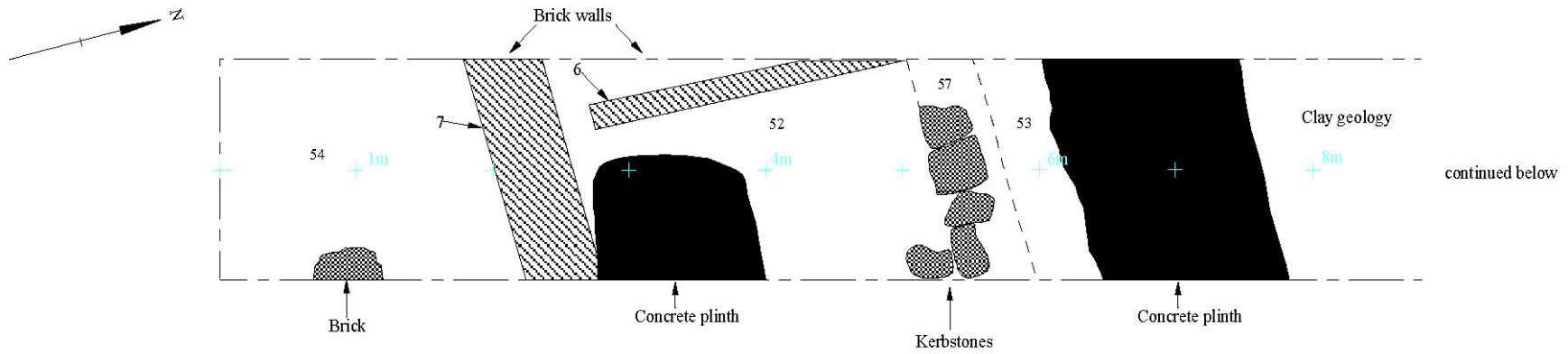


Figure 4. Plan of Trench 1 showing features

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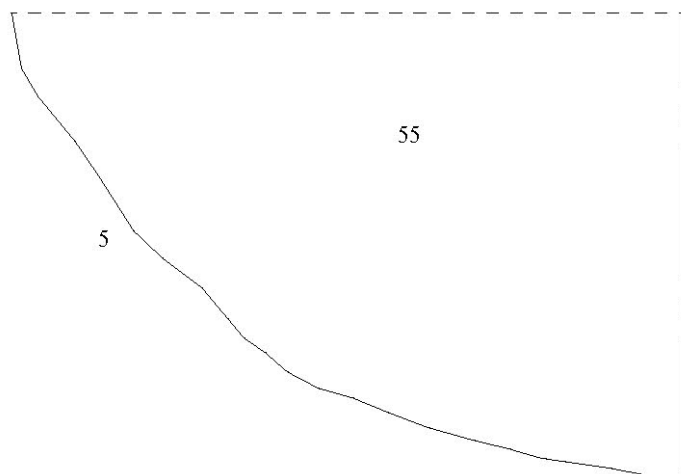
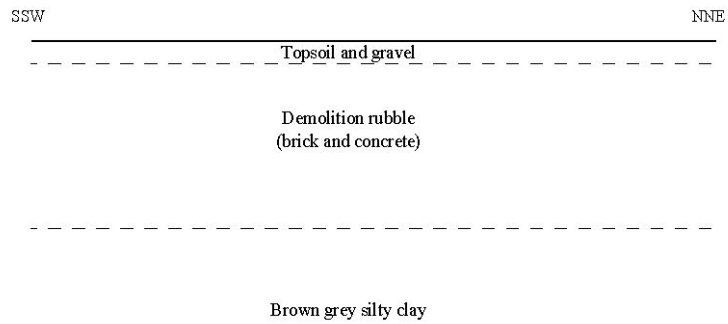
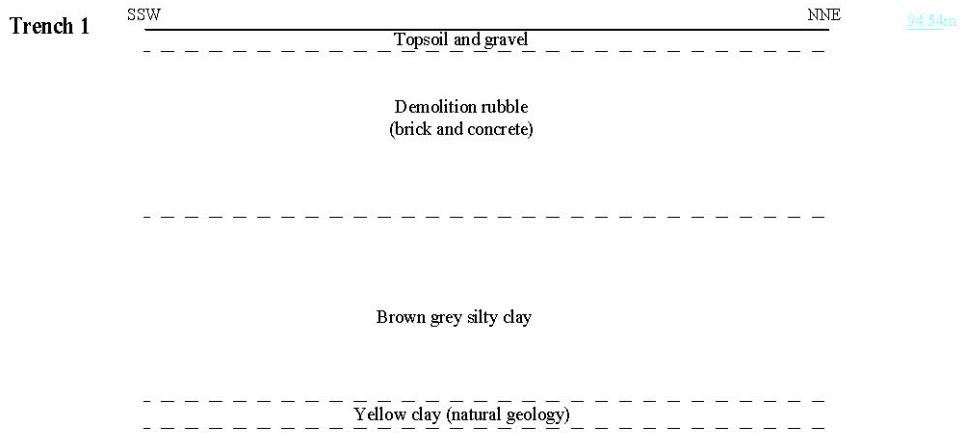


Figure 5. Sections: feature 5 and representative section of trench



Plate 1. Feature 5 looking west, horizontal scale 1m, vertical scale 0.5m.



Plate 2. Trench 1 looking south, horizontal scales 2m and 1m.