

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION

**THE DOWER HOUSE
QUATT
NR BRIDGNORTH
SHROPSHIRE**

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Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2. INTRODUCTION	4
3. HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND	7
4. METHODOLOGY	7
5. RESULTS	8
6. CONCLUSIONS	16
7. COPYRIGHT	16
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY	17

Frontispiece: View looking south with the Dower House visible top left

REPORT SPECIFICATION

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1. Executive Summary

Border Archaeology was commissioned by Rachael Johnstone on behalf of the National Trust to carry out archaeological observation of drainage ground works and associated structural disturbance relating to the conversion to dwellings of the Dower House and associated outbuildings.

Of note was the discovery during the course of the ground works of a brick-built tank or cistern with a vaulted roof. This feature predated the existing garden wall and was thought to be associated with the Dower House, possibly for storing water.

No further features were identified, with, to the north, the only deposits being the topsoil and a naturally derived subsoil. A possible field boundary in Field 1 contained modern material indistinguishable from the topsoil.

Closer to the Dower House, considerable dumping of modern rubbish, dating from the last half-century, was evident and the presence of brick building rubble may be indicative of the demolition of structures associated with the 19th century 'Poor Law School', later known as the 'South-East Shropshire District School'.

All finds from the site were of later post-medieval and modern date and post-dated construction of the Dower House. Their presence was noted, but they were not retained.

Work on site took place between March 21st and June 28th 2013.



2. Introduction

Border Archaeology was instructed by Rachael Johnstone on behalf of the National Trust to undertake archaeological observation of drainage works relating to the conversion of the Dower House and associated outbuildings to dwellings (Figs. 1-3). The proposal entails the conversion of the house to two residential units, converting ‘The Kindergarten’ to a single unit, creating two units in the Gymnasium building and converting the coach house to two further units (Planning Ref. 12/00886/FUL).

The site lies on the A442, some 6.35km SSE of Bridgnorth, and within the Quatt conservation area (Fig. 1).

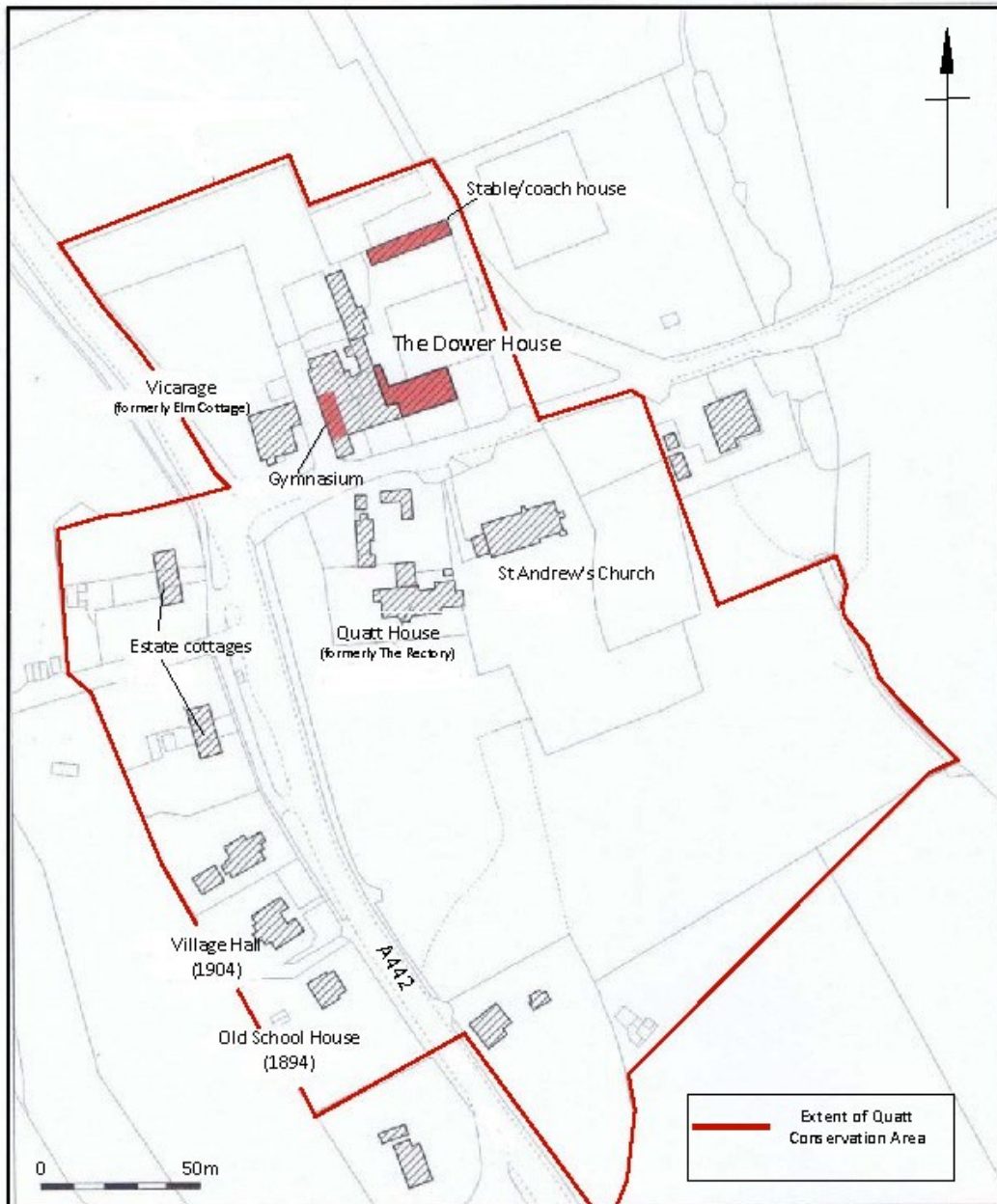


Fig. 1: Plan showing location of the Dower House & extent of the Quatt Conservation area



The aim of the observation programme was to locate and record any archaeological finds, features or deposits within the ground-works area and to confirm that no impact on the archaeological resource occurred during the course of the ground-works without the implementation of this programme.

Copies of this report will be supplied in the agreed formats to Rachael Johnstone National Trust and to Mick Krupa Esq Planning Archaeologist Shropshire Council.

2.1 Soils & Geology

The soils of the area consist of brown earths of the WICK 1 Series comprising deep well drained coarse loamy and sandy soils, locally over gravel overlying glaciofluvial or river terrace drift (SSEW 1983).

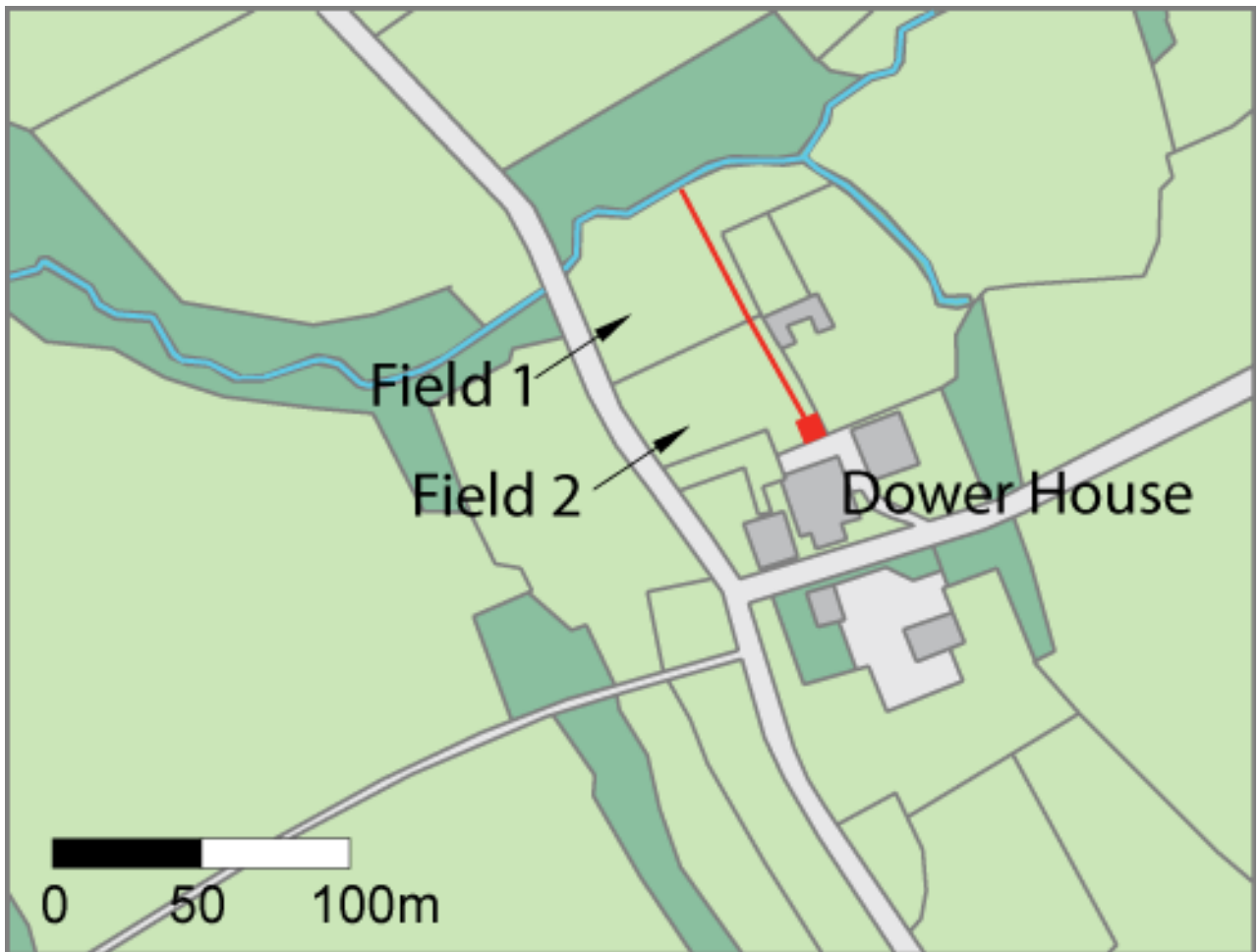


Fig. 2: Route of the new drainage to the N of the Dower House

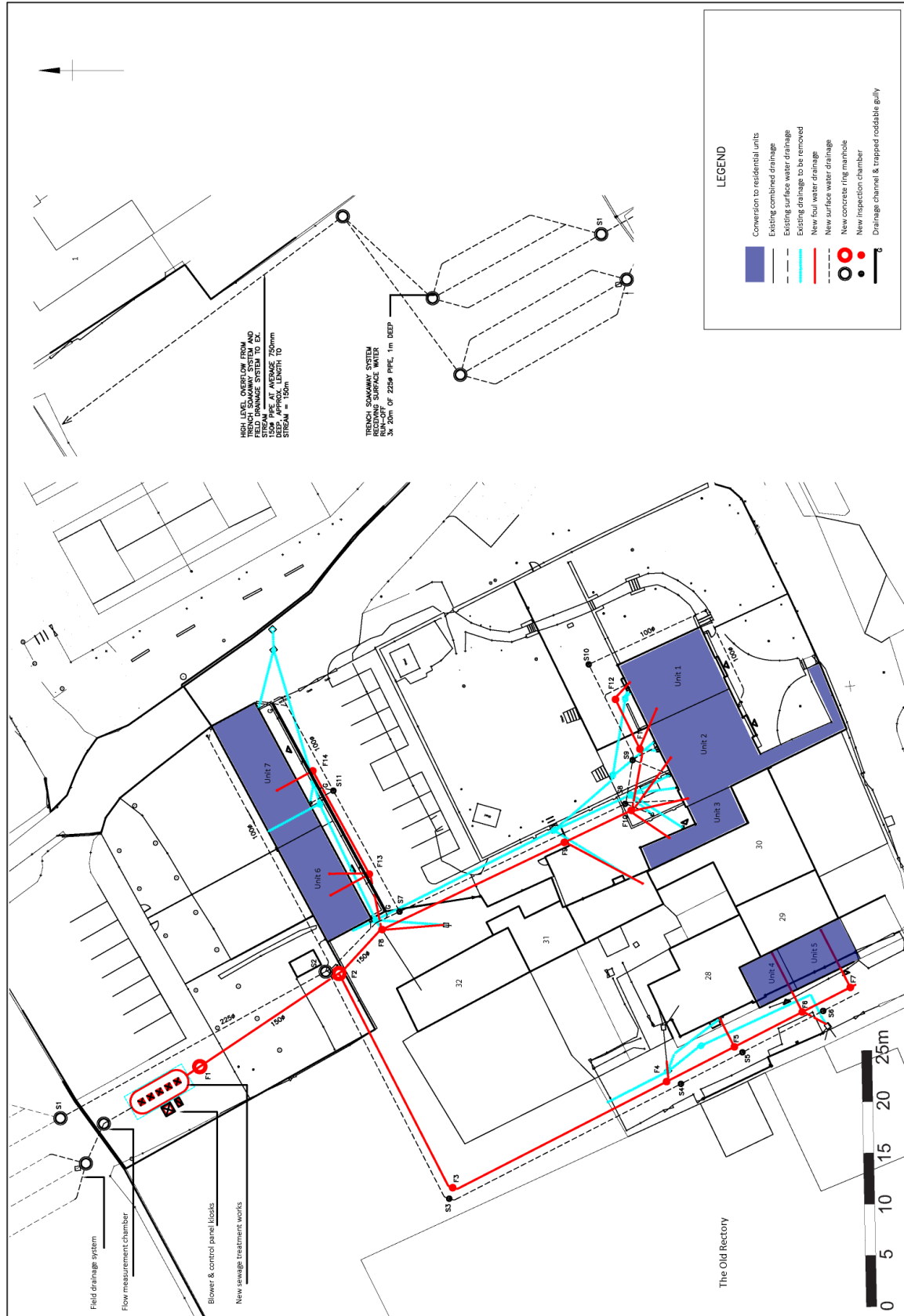


Fig.3: Drainage layout around the Dower House (as supplied to Border Archaeology for information)



3. Historical & archaeological background

Quatt occupies a landscape characterised by Romano-British or later prehistoric activity, most of the evidence for which comprises cropmarks identified during aerial photography. The closest of these, a ditched rectangular enclosure lies some 400m SW of the study area.

Domesday Book (1086) records details of the manor of Quatt which was held by Earl Roger of Montgomery under the name 'Quatone', while later forms appear as 'Quatte' (1208-9), 'Quatoe' (1316), 'Quat' (1320) and 'Cutt' in 1604 (Gelling 1990, 247). The Grade II* listed church of St Andrew (HER No. 12008) is of medieval origin but includes much Georgian work.

The Dower House at Quatt was constructed during the 1680s when the property was known as the 'New House'. However, the house remained incomplete until well into the 18th century. It is a Grade II* Listed building (EH1053767)

Around 1838, William Wolryche-Whitmore, a former MP, leased out the Dower House and outbuildings for use as a 'Poor Law School'. Later known as the 'South-East Shropshire District School', the institution was successful enough to become a model widely emulated in other parts of the country with schools in Cardiff and elsewhere adopting the so-called 'Quatt-system'. The premises were enlarged in 1850 to accommodate increased capacity. However, subsequent educational reform questioned the necessity of maintaining the district school at Quatt, as the education of the 'pauper children' was now the responsibility of the State, and the school was closed in March 1905 after which the building once again reverted to use as a private dwelling. Much of the later fabric dating from the enlargement of the school in 1850 was demolished; some of the bricks from the demolished buildings were apparently re-used to form the surviving walled garden of the house.

In 1978 the house was acquired by the National Trust as part of Dudmaston Estate and, from 1982, was leased out as an independent co-educational day school for 2-11 year olds. The Dower House School was administered as a charity managed by a board of trustees; however, following a board resolution of July 2010, it was agreed that the school should close.

It is not thought that any archaeological work has previously taken place on the site itself.

4. Methodology

The archaeological programme of work detailed herein was carried out in accordance with recognised sources of professional guidance, including *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (EH 2006). Reference was also made to the relevant English Heritage Historic Environment Local Management (HELM) resources. Border Archaeology adheres to the IfA *Code of conduct* (2012) and *Code of approved practice for the regulation of contractual arrangements in field archaeology* (2008).

All ground-works were carried out by machine and toothless bucket (wherever possible) under archaeological supervision.



A full written and photographic record was compiled in accordance with Border Archaeology's *Field Recording Manual* (2013). Context information was recorded on individual numbered pro-forma sheets to create a detailed stratigraphic record. Plans & sections, where produced, were recorded onto gridded, archivally stable polyester film at an appropriate scale. All site drawings are numbered and listed in a register, these drawing numbers being cross-referenced to written site records.

The photographic record was made using a high-resolution digital camera, comprising photographs of all excavated contexts and archaeological features and structures. Included in each photograph are appropriate scales and all photographic records have been indexed and cross-referenced to written site records. Details concerning subject and direction of view are maintained in a photographic register, indexed by frame number.

5. Results

The drainage trench ran S from the brook at the N end of the site, across the meadow (*Fig. 3; Table 1*), through the hedge and across the former playing field (*Fig. 3; Table 2*) to the position of the 'Klargester' tank (*Fig. 3; Table 3*). From the tank it continued S across the parking area (5.4, *Fig. 1*) to the former coach house (5.5) where it ran E through gardens to an existing chamber (5.6). A further run continued to the S to the Dower House itself.

5.1 Field 1 (*Fig. 2; Plate 1*)

No deposits of archaeological significance were present in Field 1, which lay at the northern extent of the drainage run. No evidence for a worked subsoil was identified, with the topsoil lying above naturally derived deposits.

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
FIELD 1	(101)	Soft, mid-dark brown, sandy silt; fairly clean; occasional post-medieval pottery, rare small sub-angular stone; extends over site to max 0.40m. (?)Cut by [104]. Overlies (102)	<i>Modern topsoil</i>
	(102)	Friable, bright reddish-brown clay, no visible inclusions; present to full depth of trench. Underlies (102).	<i>Natural alluvial clay at N end of the site, close to the stream</i>
	(103)	Indurated bedrock & greenish marled clay (visible occasionally visible in base of trench). Underlies (102)	<i>Natural bedrock & marled clays</i>



	[104]	Cut; form unknown; sides gently sloping, base flat. Measures > 1.5m x 2m x 0.80m. (?)Cuts (101). Filled by (104)	<i>Ditch or pit, possibly representing former field boundary aligned with existing hedge-line</i>
	(105)	Soft, mid-dark brown, sandy silt, fairly clean with occasional post-medieval pottery (C19 to C20) & rare small sub-angular stone. Indistinguishable from topsoil (101)	<i>Fill of ditch/pit[104]</i>

Table 1: deposits in Field 1

The possible field boundary had been backfilled with material indistinguishable from the topsoil suggesting that it was of recent date or had been recently backfilled.



Plate 1: Field 1 facing N to commencement of drain-run

5.2 Field 2 (Fig. 2)

The drain run passed through the field boundary and continued to the N. The topsoil (101) was present as in Field 1. At the southern end of Field 2 (13.5m S of the boundary), the



following deposits were present. Previous cultivation may be implied by the presence of ceramic land drains within the subsoil.

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
FIELD 2	(101)	Moderately compact dark greyish-brown silt clay	<i>Modern topsoil</i>
	(106)	Firm/friable mid reddish-brown silt, patches of yellow and green clay and red gravel. Underlies (101). Overlies (103)	<i>Apparent variations in natural subsoil</i>
	(103)	Indurated bedrock & greenish marled clay (visible occasionally visible in base of trench). Underlies (102)	<i>Natural bedrock & marled clays as in Field 1</i>

Table 2: deposits in Field 2

5.3 The 'Klargester' chamber (Fig. 3; Plate 2)

The excavation for the 'Klargester' chamber was rectangular in form and measured 8m E-W, 3.4m N-S and was excavated to a total depth of 4.2m. The topsoil (101) as seen on other parts of the site was present to a depth of some 0.35m and contained pottery of similar date (19th century and later). Its presence was noted but it was not retained. From the chamber southwards, the natural deposits were of a mixed nature with bands of clay, sand and gravel.



Plate 2: Deposits in the chamber excavation, view N

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Chamber	(101)	Firm dark greyish-brown silty	<i>Topsoil</i>



		clay, occasional C19-C20 pottery; 0.35m depth. Overlies (108)	
	(108)	Very soft and friable mid brown sand & gravel. Underlies (101). Same as (107)	<i>Subsoil</i>
	(107)	Soft sand gravel, patches of red and green marled clay. Underlies (101). Same as (106), (108)	<i>Natural deposition.</i>
	(103)	Firm reddish-brown clay, sand and gravel	<i>Bands of natural deposition</i>

Table 3: Deposits revealed during excavation for Klargester Chamber

5.4 The car park (Plate 3)

A number of layers of aggregate formed the surface of the car park with the topsoil not present. Beneath them lay the red clay natural subsoil. A large number of modern ash pits were present of which [118] was recorded as a representative sample. The finds (Plate 3) from these features were noted but they were not retained.

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Car Park	(110)	Moderately compact angular & sub-angular stone; 0.40m thickness. Overlies (102).	<i>Aggregate forming surface of car park</i>
	[118]	Cut; sides steeply sloping, base flat; measures 2.7m long × 0.30m deep. Cuts (102). Filled by (119).	<i>Cut for C20 ash pit. One of a large number of modern pits in this part of site.</i>
	(119)	Loose black silt; modern bottles (established brands), chicken wire, shoes.	<i>Fill of C20 ash pit</i>

Table 4: deposits in the car park area



Plate 3: Sample of mid-20th century bottles and jars recovered from ash pits within the car park area

5.5 The coach house (Fig. 1)

No deposits of archaeological significance were revealed, with all structures and deposits of modern date.

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Coach House	(109)	Loose-moderately compact stone; measures 0.20m depth. 22m N/S × 10m. Overlies (116)	Layer of aggregate to N of stable block forming surface adjacent to coach house
	(111)	Loose fragmentary brick; measures 1.10m × 1.20m × 0.30m. Overlies/part of (116)	Fragment of demolition debris; brickwork but unknown date. Probably associated with (112) etc.
	(112)	Indurated concrete; measures 2.50m × 2.0m × 0.08m. Abutted by (114)	Concrete slab forming modern foundation for a minor structure
	(113)	Masonry; brick; single course measures 3.5m × 0.85m × 0.2m. Associated with/abutted by [112] & [114].	Fragment of brick wall; survived to one course only; forms part of modern structure



	(114)	Indurated concrete. Abuts (112) 4.8m × 2.0m × 0.08m	<i>Concrete slab forming part of modern structure</i>
	(115)	Indurated concrete; measures 0.87 × 0.70 × 0.06m. Abuts (113).	<i>Concrete & brick slab; part of modern structure</i>
	(116)	Loose black silt; frequent rubble; measures 10m × 22m. Underlies (109)	<i>Layer of building rubble in black silt matrix located to N of (112) & (114)</i>
	(117)	Masonry; pale brick (brick size not visible); measures 0.3m × 0.24m × 0.08m. Abuts 112 & 114.	<i>Surviving fragment of modern brick structural wall</i>

Table 5: deposits and structures to the N of the Coach House

Levelling deposit (116) containing rubble presumed to originate from the demolition of the structures lay to the N of slabs [112] and [114] but did not cover them.

To the west of the coach house and modern structures [112] and [114] the area was much disturbed, with modern refuse pits contemporary with and similar to [118] and brick rubble beneath a layer of cultivated topsoil of similar composition to (101).

5.6 Gardens

The only deposits present in the garden areas were cultivated topsoil (101), and sandy red subsoil similar to (106).

5.7 The Driveway (Figs. 1 & 2; Plate 4)

No deposits of archaeological significance were observed. Deposits in this area are described in Table 6

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Driveway	(120)	Loose angular & sub-angular stone; measures < 0.10m thickness. Overlies (122)	<i>Thin layer of gravel forming existing driveway surface</i>
	(122)	Loose mid brown silty clay, frequent tarmac, brick; measures 0.25m thickness. Overlies (123). Underlies (120)	<i>Levelling dump of building rubble, composed of tarmac & brick rubble in brown silt clay matrix</i>
	(123)	Firm mid reddish-brown silty sand. Underlies (122)	<i>Natural subsoil</i>

Table 6: deposits in the area of the driveways



Plate 4: View E showing deposits revealed outside Unit 4 (fig. 3) on driveway

5.8 The cistern (Plates 5 & 6)

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Cistern	(124)	Masonry; brick; size of materials c. 0.23m × 0.12m × 0.08m; measures 3m E/W × > 0.5m N/S × 0.2m (2 bricks thickness).	Arched roof for tank or cistern
	(125)	Masonry; brick; size of materials not seen; measures 3m × 3m × 3m	Walling of cistern

A single structure was recorded on the site, to the S of the garden wall. The part seen was constructed entirely of brick and measured about 3.m in length and the same in width. Where measured it was 3m deep and contained 0.6m water in the base. ‘Tidemarks’ indicated that the water level was higher at some point (Plate 5). Pipes could be seen entering the structure from the direction of the Dower House indicating that the structure was associated with the house.

The vaulted brick roof [124] was of double thickness (Plate 4). The existing garden wall ran above it, demonstrating conclusively that the tank or cistern predated the construction of this wall.



Plate 5: View S showing vaulted roof of the brick tank or cistern

Although damaged, the bricks used were fairly soft and red, with no frogs. They more closely resembled the brick of the Dower House than that used in the construction of later buildings on the site. The mortar in the part of the structure observed was soft and cream with black flecks.

Use as a cistern is possible, perhaps collecting water from the gutters of the house, although no evidence for a pump or other means of extracting the water was seen.



Plate 6: View inside tank or cistern



6. Conclusions

At the N of the new drain, the area adjacent to the brook is prone to flooding, with heavy, alluvial, clay subsoil suggesting that it may be waterlogged for much of the year. Further to the S, the land slopes upward, presenting a steep N-facing incline. Thus, it would appear likely that the area was considered in the past to be unsuitable for habitation. There were no early finds, including residual material from the topsoil, suggesting that there was probably little occupation of this date in the near vicinity. The only finds identified in the area to the N of the Dower House were from the topsoil and were of modern date.

Over most of the site the topsoil apparently lay immediately above geological deposits (*Plate 1*). It is possible - certainly within the area of the former playing fields - that levelling and landscaping to form a flat surface may have disturbed any archaeological deposits which may have been present.

However, the most likely area for past occupation would appear to be at the top of the slope in the immediate vicinity of the Dower House itself. The church of St Andrew is of medieval date, with the earliest surviving part dating to the 12th century AD. Occupation close to the church in the medieval period would be expected; however, post-medieval disturbance may well have truncated earlier deposits.

The tank or cistern revealed to the S of the garden wall could have been roughly contemporary with the Dower House. The brickwork certainly suggested that of the older structure rather than the more recent ones and the presence of pipes heading towards the Dower House also imply that it was almost certainly an ancillary structure. It may have been used for gathering water from the guttering for use in the garden, although use as a cesspool is not out of the question.

Disturbance close to the Dower House included construction of the house itself in the late 17th -18th centuries and the construction in the 19th century and subsequent demolition of the supplementary buildings from the Poor Law School. During the 20th century considerable dumping of domestic rubbish and digging of pits may have caused further truncation to any archaeology which may have been present in the area.

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