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## Archaeological Excavation

### Border Oak

Land Adjacent to the Red Lion Inn

Bell Square Weobley Herefordshire

January 2014



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*Cover: Well (111) facing S*

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## 1 Executive Summary

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*Border Archaeology was commissioned to undertake a programme of limited archaeological excavation in advance of the construction of a proposed dwelling on the site adjacent to the former 'Red Lion' Hotel in Weobley.*

*The site lies in the historic core of the Archaeologically Important Urban Area of Weobley, some 80m S of the church of St Peter and St Paul.*

*The results of the excavation demonstrated that considerable disturbance of the site had taken place in the later post-medieval and modern periods, largely, but not entirely, associated with the construction of a W/E aligned access from Church Road to the 'Red Lion' Hotel. A stone-lined well (111) on the E side of the site may have been of some antiquity, as no brick was visible in its construction, but had remained in use until comparatively recently, with a pump mechanism still in place, sealed by the former access to the hotel.*

*The only potentially early feature on the site was a small area of burnt natural clay. However, no finds were recovered from it and truncation from the modern access had destroyed stratigraphic relationships meaning that it was not possible to establish its date.*

*Although it is possible that further archaeological deposits were originally present but had been truncated in recent times, a lack of early residual pottery may indicate that the pre-Conquest market place was maintained as an open area, as suggested by Wichbold (1995).*

## 2 Introduction

Border Archaeology was commissioned by Border Oak to undertake a programme of limited excavation on the site adjacent to the former Red Lion Hotel Bell Square Weobley Herefordshire (NGR SO 40177 51732) in advance of proposed construction of a dwelling on the site (*figs. 1 & 2*). Work on site took place between the December 2<sup>nd</sup> and December 4<sup>th</sup> 2013.

The scope of the work 'included but did not exceed the full plan-form area of the proposed dwelling' and included 'but did not exceed the full depth of development impact' (Herefordshire Council 2013). The site lies on the NE side of Bell Square, at its junction with Church Road.

Copies of this report will be submitted to Border Oak, Julian Cotton Esq Archaeological Advisor Herefordshire Council and to the Herefordshire Historic Environment Record.

### 2.1 Soils & geology

The site consists of typical argillic brown earths of the ESCRICK 1 series (571p); these being deep well drained reddish coarse loamy soils, some similar soils with slowly permeable sub-soils & slight seasonal waterlogging and some slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged reddish fine silty soils. The underlying geology is reddish till (SSEW, 1983).

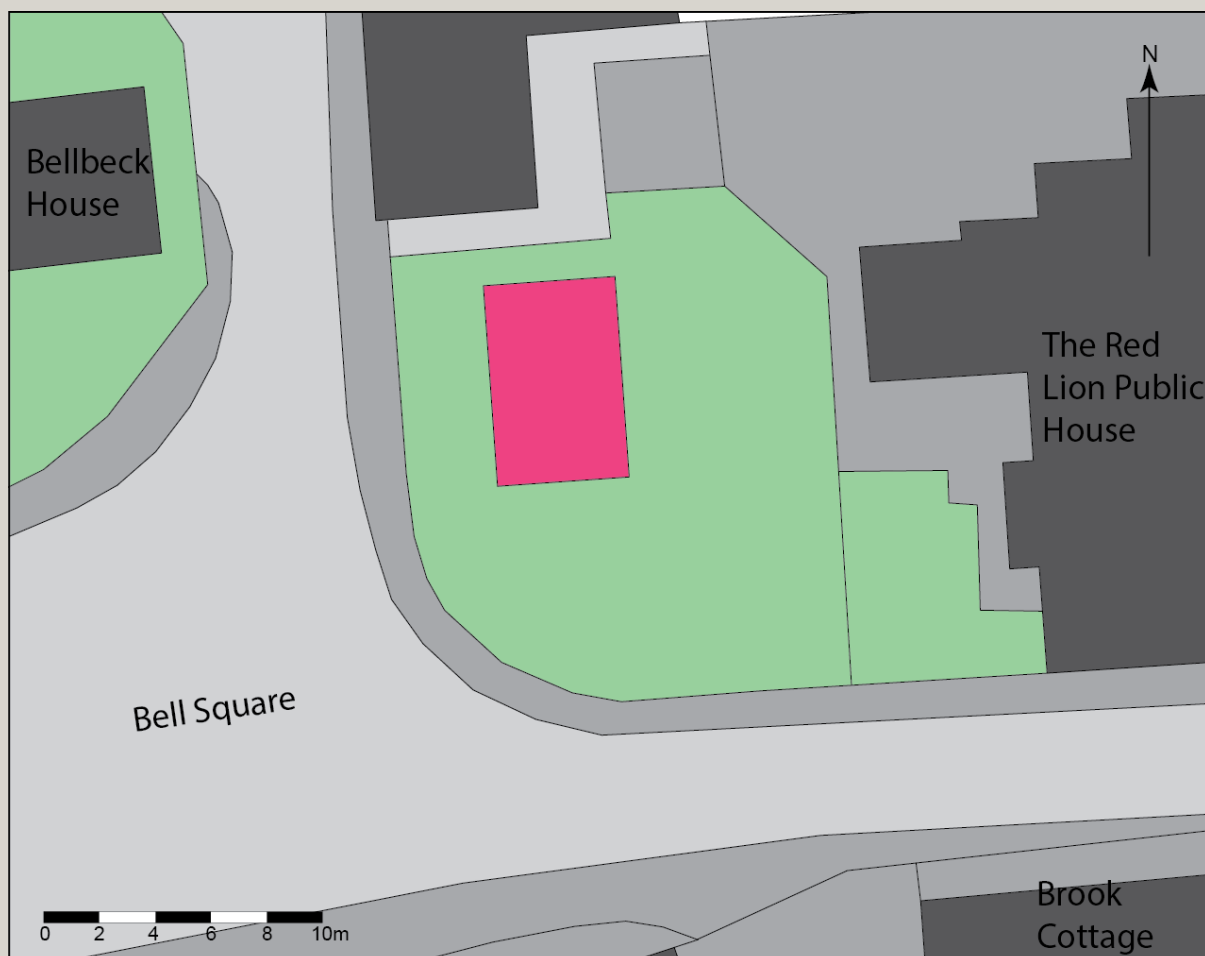


Fig. 1: Site location

### 3 Historical & Archaeological Background

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The site lies in the historic core of the town of Weobley some 80m S of the church of St Peter and St Paul. Its position suggests that it occupies a site of some considerable archaeological interest, potentially forming a key component of a pre-Conquest settlement with the church at its centre. The *Central Marches Historic Towns Survey* suggests that Bell Square occupies the site of an early marketplace forming the focus of the 11<sup>th</sup> century village prior to the creation of the 12<sup>th</sup> century borough (Dalwood 1995, 3).

An area of house platforms identified during extension works to the telephone exchange in 1980 and around the church further underpins the suggestion that this northern area of settlement preceded the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century planted borough.

Salvage recording of foundation trenches on a site suspected to lie close to the medieval marketplace by Hereford and Worcester County Council Archaeological Service in 1995 revealed no deposits earlier than modern in date. These results were interpreted as suggesting that this may have been maintained as an open area associated with the marketplace (Wichbold 1995).

Bell Square occupies a small rectangular area defined by modern plot boundaries on the S side and by the alignment of former boundaries to the N. A larger marketplace was later established in Broad Street, which is aligned on the castle, defined by blocks of regular tenements, and is presumably contemporary with the creation of the borough. Both medieval marketplaces may have remained in use until the post-medieval period, although it seems likely that the original Bell Square site had become disused by this time. By the time of the 1838 Tithe Apportionment the site was listed as garden and was occupied by two structures. These had been removed by the time of the OS 1<sup>st</sup> edition of 1887. Later OS maps show the site as open land.

A number of listed buildings fronting onto Bell Square reflect the historical status of this N part of the settlement during the medieval and early post-medieval period. The Red Lion Hotel is a Grade II\*listed building formerly comprising a house and outbuilding parts of which date to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. No 1 Bell Square is of 15<sup>th</sup> century date and timber-frame construction, with later alteration. Brook Cottage and May Cottage both date to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### 4 Methodology

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The archaeological programme of work detailed herein was carried out in accordance with recognised sources of professional guidance including *Standard and Guidance for archaeological excavation* (IfA 2008) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE) (EH 2006). Border Archaeology adheres to the IfA *Code of conduct* (2013) and *Code of approved practice for the regulation of contractual arrangements in field archaeology* (2008).

The scope of the work entailed a programme of limited archaeological excavation which 'included but did not exceed the full plan-form area of the proposed dwelling' and included 'but did not exceed the full depth of development impact' (Herefordshire Council 2013).

Full written and photographic records were made in accordance with Border Archaeology's *Archaeological Field Recording Manual* (BA, 2014). The written record comprised detailed stratigraphic recording using a context numbering system. The photographic record was made using a high-resolution (12 MPX) 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 were maintained in a photographic register, indexed by frame number.

All drawings were produced on gridded, archivally stable polyester film in accordance with BA's *Archaeological Field Recording Manual* (BA, 2014). All drawings were numbered and listed in a drawing register, these drawing numbers being cross-referenced to written site records.

## 5 Results

The latest deposit on the site was a dark greyish-brown silt clay garden soil (101) some 0.20m thick, imported following levelling of the site in recent times. It overlay a mixed rubble (102), which formed the backfill of a former access to the Red Lion from Church Street and which comprised bricks, concrete blocks, scrap iron, polystyrene and other rubbish in a silt-sand matrix.

Underlying (102) was the latest surface of access or driveway [104], which consisted of a 0.10m-thick layer of limestone scalplings (103). This overlay the original surface (113) of laid, reused brick (including bricks from the Holmer Brickworks dating to the 1830s and later) on a shallow layer of rubble. At the N edge of the drive, a number of unworked and un-bonded fragments of sandstone (121) may have formed a rough retaining wall. The cut [104] for the access was about 5m wide and a maximum of 0.80m deep; it sloped up from the W (Church Road) towards the hotel car park.

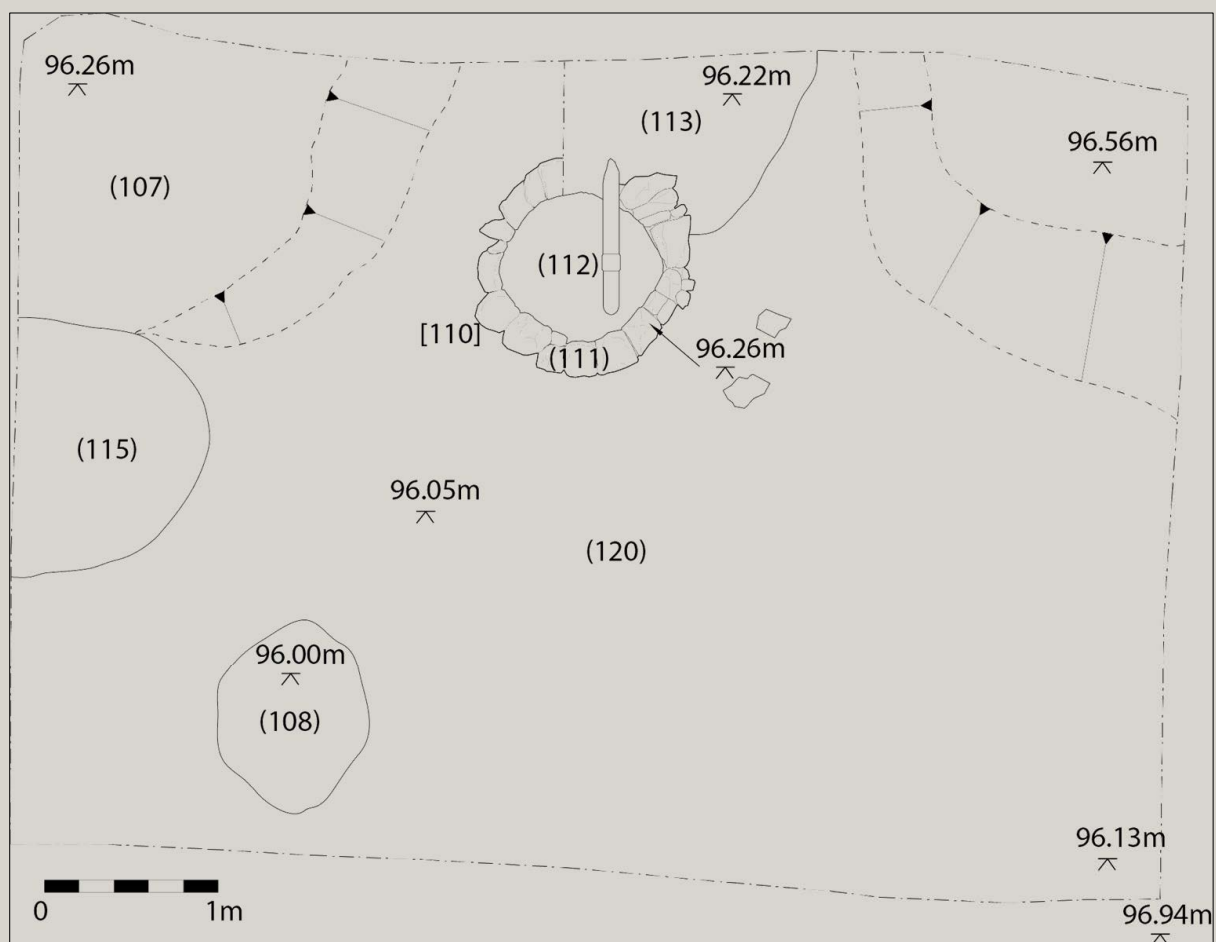


Fig. 2: Plan of excavation area

On the S side of the site, [104] cut a deposit of very loose dark greyish-brown silty clay (114) with irregular medium-sized fragments of sandstone rubble and moderate charcoal flecking. Although apparently a garden soil, the extremely loose compaction and the large amount of rubble present suggested that it had been disturbed in the recent past and may have been a levelling deposit. No dating evidence was observed in this material.

Driveway [104] also cut pit [119], which contained three fills. The latest (118) was a 0.80m-thick, soft but compact dark greyish-brown silt clay soil, with occasional large flecks of charcoal. No finds were seen in it and it may have been a dump of garden soil. It overlay (117), also a silt clay, 0.20m thick, which was fairly clean and much yellower in colour than both (118) above and (116) below. The basal fill (116) was 0.40m thick and similar in composition to (118). No dating evidence was recovered from any of the fills, but the pit cut (105), which dated to

the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so was clearly modern in date. The cut [119] was over 0.80m deep and 1.50m wide. Its sides sloped steeply towards the base, which, however, lay beyond the N limit of the excavation.

Cut on its W side by pit [119] was pit [106]. Its upper part was irregular in form, with gently sloping sides. Overall, it was more than 2m deep, extending outside the excavation area, and, although investigated in a hand-cut sondage, the base was not encountered. Fill (105) was a loose dark greyish-brown silt clay with frequent irregular fragments of sandstone, CBM and large flecks of charcoal and plaster.

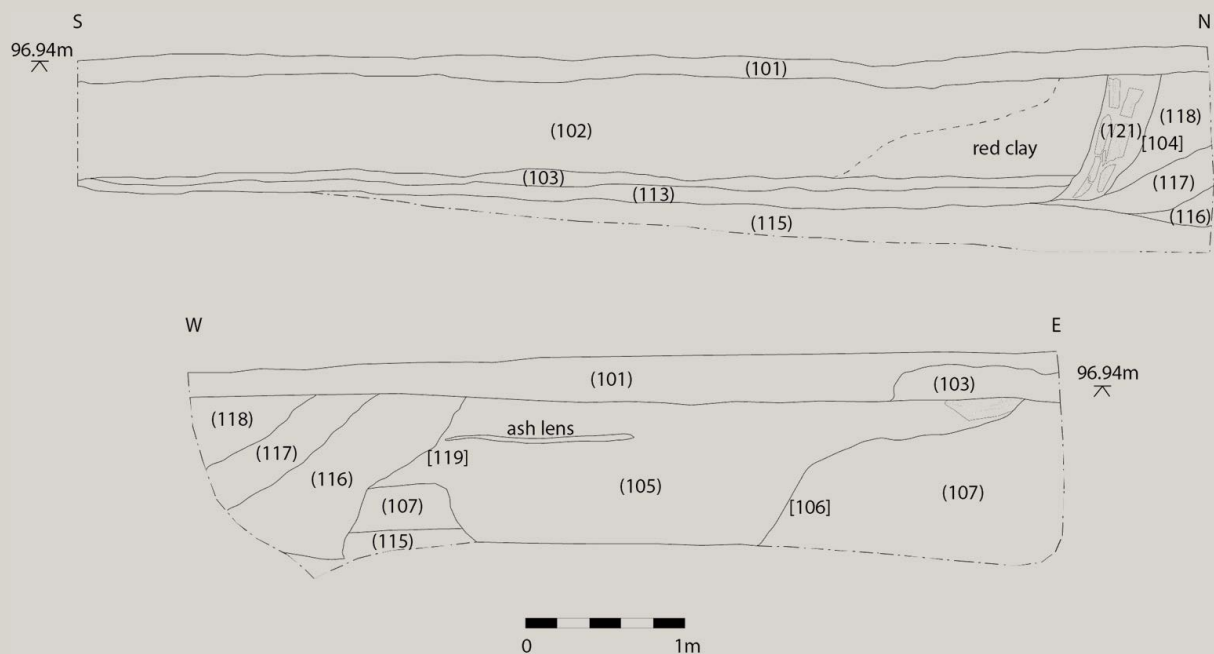


Fig. 3: E- and S-facing sections of the site

Pottery from this deposit dated to the later post-medieval period and included numerous sherds of transfer-printed wares and also local red-wares. A date in the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seems likely for this feature. Well (111) lay on the E part of the site (*Plate 1, fig. 4*). The cut [110] was 1.30m in diameter and the internal diameter of the well itself was 0.90m. The lining (111) was of sandstone, roughly shaped and earth-bonded. No brick was seen in the lining, suggesting that it may have been of some antiquity. However, it was also apparent that it had remained in use until comparatively recently, as a pump, still in place and sealed by the earliest surface of the driveway (113), was present. After it went out of use, the well was filled with a soft and cohesive very dark greyish-brown silt clay (112) with charcoal flecks. No dating evidence was recovered from it.

In the NE corner of the site, pit [106] cut red clay (107). The upper 0.10m of this deposit contained a number of stones and white and black flecks. However, the inclusions were thought to represent surface disturbance and contamination of a natural deposit as, at greater depth, (107) became cleaner and could not be distinguished from natural clay (120). At the S end of the site, a similar process had taken place, with clay (109) similar to (107) lying immediately above natural gravel (115).



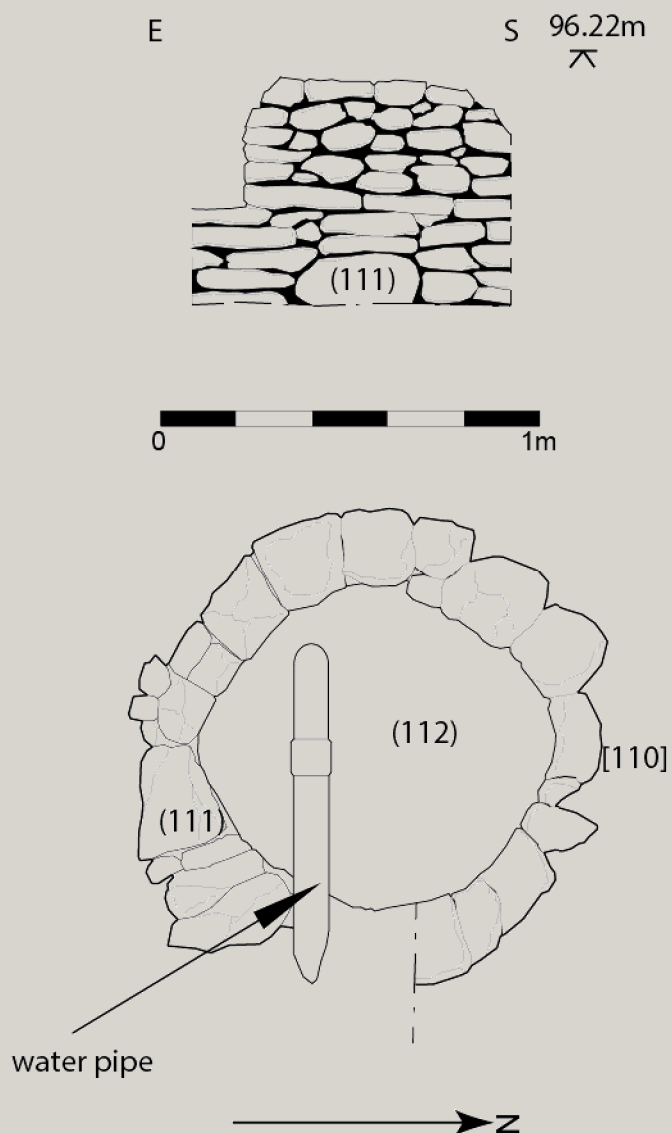


Fig 4: Well (111)

On the SW part of the site, a patch of burning (108) (*Plate 1*) of natural (120) measured 1m E/W × 0.80m N/S. It was bright orange-brown in colour and soft and silty. It contained numerous small flecks of charcoal. However, truncation by modern feature [104] and a lack of finds meant that it was not possible to date this feature.

Natural (120) was a very compact red clay, up to 0.40m thick, with fragments of green and black sandstone. It overlay the natural red gravel (115).



*Plate 1: View of the site facing S, showing burnt area (108) [front right] & well (111)*

## 6 Conclusions

Any potential archaeological deposits on the site had been heavily impacted by recent activity, with almost total truncation of earlier deposits making it impossible to suggest a date for the only surviving potentially early feature, burnt area (108). The earliest [106] of the sequence of large features truncating earlier deposits dated from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and later, and may relate to the demolition of structures shown on the 1838 Tithe Map. These buildings were no longer present by the end of the century and were not shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887. Demolition and clearance of these structures probably further affected any below-ground archaeology on the site.

The former access from Church Road to the Red Lion car park had caused further damage to any possibly surviving archaeological deposits, particularly on the S part of the site, where it cut into disturbed or contaminated natural clay (109).

While the amount of truncation made it difficult to ascertain whether archaeological deposits had been present, it was noticeable that very little residual pottery was recovered from the site and that the earliest pottery dated to the later medieval or early post-medieval period. By this time, the buildings that became the Red Lion Hotel were already in existence and it may be that pottery found on the site was associated with these later medieval buildings. It is possible, therefore, that this part of the early marketplace was maintained as an open area into the later medieval period, as suggested by Wichbold (1995).

## 7 Copyright

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## 9 Appendix 1: Context Register

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION
(101)	Loose dark grey brown silt clay, occasional modern CBM, occasional pebbles, frequent tree and grass roots; measured 0.20m thick, trench-wide. Overlies (102), (105) (108).
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Topsoil</i>
(102)	Loose greyish-brown silt sand, frequent brick & modern rubbish, including expanded polystyrene and scrap iron; measured 6m N/S × 0.60m (thickness). Fill of [104], underlies (101) overlies (103)
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Rubble backfill of former drive</i>
(103)	Compacted scalplings 6m N/S × 5m E/W × 0.10m thick. Below (102) above (113)
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Layer of scalplings forming latest surface of former drive</i>
[104]	Cut; linear in plan; aligned E/W, sloping upwards to E; measured 6m × 5m × 0.70m; break of slope top unclear, sides steeply sloping, break of slope base curving, base flat. Cuts (116), filled by (113), (103) (102)
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Cut for former driveway to 'Red Lion'</i>
(105)	Loose dark greyish-brown silt clay, frequent stone & brick rubble, large flecks of plaster, large charcoal flecks & post-medieval pottery (not retained). Fill of [106]
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Fill of late post-medieval pit</i>
[106]	Cut; probably sub-rectangular in plan; aligned E/W (?); break of slope top unclear, sides steeply sloping; measured. 3.5m E/W × (?)3m N/S × >2.0m deep
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Cut for post-medieval pit located at edge of site; form and dimensions uncertain</i>
(107)	Hard reddish-brown clay, white and black flecking in NE corner of site; measured 3m N/S × 5m E/W × 0.15m thick
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Levelling dump; became cleaner at depth and may be disturbed natural</i>
(108)	Bright reddish-brown silt clay, moderate charcoal; measured 1.0m E/W × 0.80m N/S × 50mm.. Cut by [104] above/part of (120)
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Burnt patch in clay (120)</i>
(109)	Firm/hard bright reddish-brown clay, moderate white flecks & stone; measured 5m E/W × >0.3m N/S × 0.20m
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Red clay on S end of site; disturbed or contaminated natural</i>
[110]	Cut; circular in plan; measured 1.25m diameter; break of slope top not clear, sides vertical, break of slope base & base not seen. Cuts (120) filled by (111) (112)
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Cut for well</i>
(111)	Masonry; circular in plan; regularly coursed, roughly squared un-bonded old red sandstone blocks (average dimensions. 300mm × 200mm × 50mm; faces inwards; measured 1.20m diameter × >0.60m deep. Fill of [110], beneath (112)
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Well lining</i>
(112)	Soft and loose but cohesive dark greyish-brown silt clay, moderate large mortar inclusions & charcoal flecks; measured >0.60m deep. Fills [110], overlies (111), underlies (113)
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Modern backfill for well (111)</i>
(113)	Masonry; brick construction; oriented N/S; measured >6.0m N/S × 5.0m E/W × 0.08m. Underlies (103), fills [104]
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Surface of former access to 'Red Lion'</i>
(114)	Soft, loose dark greyish-brown silt clay, frequent irregular sandstone & charcoal flecks; measured >4m E/W × 1.20m N/S × 0.80m. Cut by [104], overlies (109)
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Levelling dump at S end of site.</i>
(115)	Very firmly compacted /hard reddish-brown gravel; extended site-wide (but drier and harder to S). Upper part disturbed
INTERPRETATION:	<i>Possible natural deposit</i>
(116)	Firm dark brown clay, occasional charcoal flecks; measured 0.40m thick. Fills [119] below (117)

<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Fill of late post-medieval pit [119]</i>
(117)	Firm yellowish-brown silt, occasional large charcoal flecks; measured 0.20 m thick. Underlies (118), overlies (116), fill of [119]
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Fill of late post-medieval pit</i>
(118)	Firm dark brown silt clay, frequent CBM flecking & large charcoal flecks. Cut by [104], overlies (117) fill of [119]
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Fill of late post-medieval/modern pit [119]</i>
[119]	Cut; form unknown; measured >0.80m deep and 1.50m wide; viewed in N & W sections; break of slope top unclear, sides steeply sloping sides, break of slope base not seen, base not seen. Filled by (116), (117), (118), cuts [105]
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Late post-medieval/modern pit</i>
(120)	Bright red clay; clean and with occasional small stones; extent unknown. Underlies (107)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Natural red clay revealed in sondage in NE corner of site.</i>
(121)	Masonry; unworked un-bonded sandstone, no obvious coursing; measured 0.30m (width) × 0.60m (depth). Underlies (102)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Possible retaining wall for driveway/access or rubble dump at N end of [104]</i>

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