

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

Former GPO Building Sansome Walk Worcester Worcestershire

NGR: SO 85020 55240

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1. Non Technical Summary

An archaeological excavation was carried out at the site of the former GPO building in Sansome Walk Worcester to further investigate features revealed during field evaluation undertaken by Border Archaeology in January 2008.

The evaluation trenching exposed what appeared to be a large pit or linear feature [206] at the eastern end of the site. Full excavation, however, revealed that this in fact represented two adjacent post-medieval sand extraction pits, [206] & [228], sharing several fills.

Most other features appeared to be modern and were probably associated with groundworks relating to construction or demolition of the GPO building; however, a linear feature running adjacent to Sansome Walk appeared to represent the survival of a boundary ditch, probably demarcating plots shown in this area on the 1741, 1779 and 1781 plans of Worcester.



2. Introduction

An archaeological field evaluation carried out on the site of the former GPO building by Border Archaeology in January 2008 revealed a substantial feature in Trench 2, the date and nature of which could not be established without further investigation. James Dinn of Worcester City Council thus advised that an area centred upon Trench 2 (**Fig. 5**) should be fully excavated and Border Archaeology was duly instructed by Markey Builders to carry out this work on behalf of Severn Vale Housing.

The site is located at Sansome Walk Worcester adjacent to Foregate Street station (SO 85020 55240) (Fig. 1).

Copies of this report will be submitted to Markey Builders / Severn Vale Housing, James Dinn and Worcestershire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).

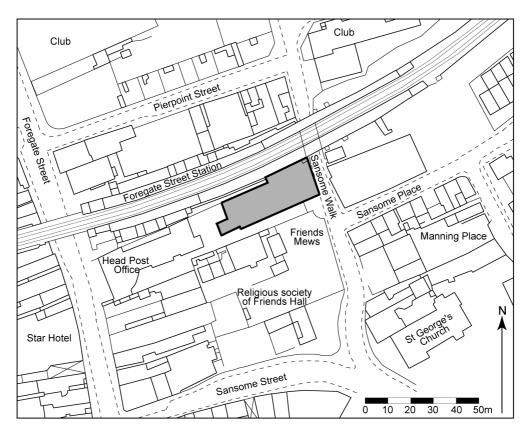


Fig. 1: Site location plan

2.1 Soils & Geology

The Soil Survey of England and Wales classifies Worcester as an unsurveyed area (SSEW, 1983). The excavation, however, revealed soils similar to the typical brown earths of the WICK 1 series (541r), these being deep well drained coarse loamy and sandy soils, locally over gravel with some similar soils affected by groundwater, with underlying geology consisting of glaciofluvial or river terrace drift.



3. Historical & Archaeological Background

3.1 General

The site comprises a rectangular plot of land located on the W side of Sansome Walk, immediately adjacent to Foregate Street station viaduct, which lies to the N. Immediately to the S of the site is the Grade II listed Friends Meeting House (Quakers), built in 1701.

3.2 Prehistoric

Little evidence for prehistoric settlement has been identified within the immediate environs of the site, although Bronze Age occupation has been recorded in and around the city at locations such as Perdiswell, Kemerton and Aston Mill (Hurst 2002) and numerous flints have been recovered.

3.3 Iron Age and Roman

Iron Age settlement in Worcester appears to have centred upon the cathedral area and, although the precise origin and form of the early Roman settlement remain unclear, its nucleus seems to have been based on the Iron Age settlement.

Recent archaeological investigations near Sansome Walk have located little evidence of Roman occupation and it would appear that the Roman settlement in Worcester did not extend this far. An evaluation at Sansome Place in 2000 (WCM100522) recovered a single sherd of Roman reduced ware, which was suggested to represent a low level of Roman agricultural activity.

3.4 Medieval

The site is a considerable distance outside the Anglo-Saxon burgh and lies beyond the line of the medieval city wall and ditch (constructed c. 1100AD), which roughly follows the line of the adjoining Sansome Street in this area. Speed's plan of Worcester, dated 1610, unfortunately does not include detail beyond the then city boundary.

Archaeological investigations near Sansome Walk have revealed patchy evidence of medieval occupation and agricultural activity. An evaluation on the northern side of Sansome Street (HWCM 7551) located a medieval ditch and pit and a later evaluation on the southern side in 1997 (HWCM 24482) located the city ditch as well as surviving medieval material. The evaluations in Sansome Place (WCM100522), however, found only one sherd of medieval pottery and no medieval features, suggesting possible agricultural use. The results suggest a limited exploitation of the ground beyond the city defences during the medieval period in this area.

3.5 Post-medieval

The nearest archaeologically observed excavations were located immediately N of the site on Pierpoint Street, where shallow trenching was dug to accommodate CCTV cabling. No significant archaeological remains were revealed, although a possible cultivated soil and 18th/19th century housing foundations were identified (WCM100904). The evaluations on Sansome Street to the W of the site, at Sansome Place (WCM100522), four trenches were



excavated around Lion's Walk, one of which located two sub-rectangular pits that were interpreted as relating to sand and gravel extraction. The backfills of these features consisted of post-medieval domestic refuse and CBM.

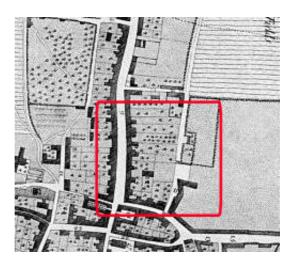


Fig 2: Dougharty's Plan of Worcester City 1741-2



Fig 3: Young's Plan of Worcester City and Suburbs 1779

Worcester mapmaker John Dougharty's plan of 1741 (**Fig. 2**) and Young's 1779 (**Fig. 3**) and 1781 plans all show the site forming part of a series of tenement plots and gardens associated with buildings along Foregate Street. The Religious Society of Friends building (constructed 1701) adjacent to the site had already been constructed by the time of Dougharty's 1741 map. No structures are discernible along Sansome Walk other than a series of buildings on the interface between Sansome Walk and Pierpoint Street and again between Sansome Walk and Sansome Street. During the early 18th century, the areas around Sansome Street were developed as a park, referred to as Sansome Fields, though most of this area was sold for development during the mid 18th century.

The 1891 OS map shows the viaduct, built in 1860, and an L-shaped building constructed along the eastern and northern edges of the site that lies adjacent to the viaduct (**Fig. 4**). A smaller building is visible in the location later used by the GPO building. The GPO building itself was constructed post 1960 to the specifications of a nuclear bunker and its deep concrete foundations would thus have removed any surviving archaeology within the footprint of the building.



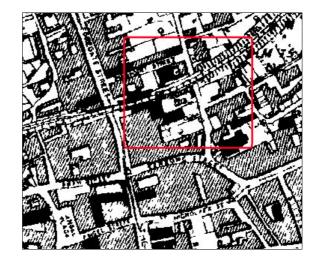


Fig 4: Worcester OS 1st Edition map of 1891

An archaeological field evaluation carried out by Border Archaeology in January 2008 revealed post-medieval features, including two large and several smaller pits that were filled with brick rubble, possibly relating to construction of the railway viaduct in 1860.

4. Methodology

Full written, drawn and photographic records were made in accordance with archaeological practices set out in *Standard and Guidance for archaeological excavation* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1995 revised 2001); Border Archaeology adheres to the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of conduct* and *Code of approved practice for the regulation of contractual arrangements in field archaeology*.

A detailed stratigraphic record was made using a sequential context numbering system starting from (201) and this was summarised in graphic form using a Harris matrix (Appendix 2). This system of numbering is consistent with that used during the evaluation phase.

Archaeological deposits, features and structures were recorded in plan at a scale of 1:20 and in section or elevation at 1:10, as appropriate. All features and structures were photographed using an 8MPX digital format. A TBM of 22.75m OD was established with reference to an OS benchmark located on the railway viaduct adjacent to the site and from this all site levels were taken.

The excavation area measured approximately 9m x 6.6m and was located at the eastern end of the site encompassing much of the area lying between Sansome Walk and the edge of the former GPO building excavations (**Fig. 5**). This coincided with the location of Evaluation Trench 2, which was cleared of backfill prior to the start of the excavation so that all features previously identified could be relocated and excavation depths determined.

Initial machine excavation was carried out using a toothless bucket and all features were subsequently excavated by hand. Finds were retained from sealed contexts revealed at the excavation depth; later finds were noted but not retained.



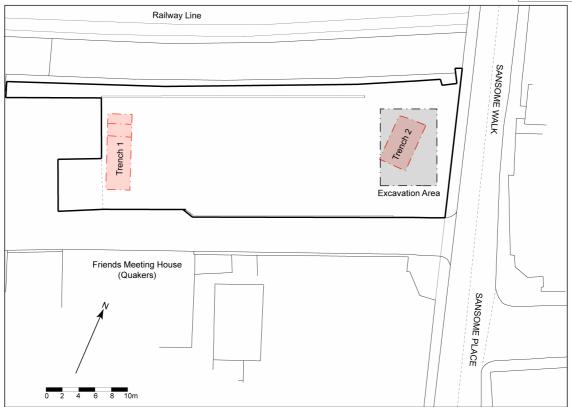


Fig 5: Plan of site showing the location of the excavation area in relation to the previous evaluation trenching

5. Results

5.1 Phase 1

This consisted of natural sands (222) overlaid by loose mid orangey-brown sand with occasional patches of silt and charcoal flecking (235). Although it is tempting to interpret this as an occupation deposit, the coloration and charcoal appeared to be the result of earthworm (*lumbricus terrestris*) activity and root disturbance.

5.2 Phase 2

Cutting into (235) were three distinct features, two of which, pits [206] & [228], appeared to have been excavated, or, at least, backfilled at the same time (**Plates 2, 3, 4 & 5; Figs. 6, 7, 8 & 12**). These were misinterpreted as a single feature at the evaluation stage, as the upper fills of both pits were identical. The majority of [228] was marginally outside the line of the evaluation trench, with only one corner lying within it.

Both [206] and [228] were N–S sub-rectangular pits of considerable depth. At their deepest points, pit [206] was 1.7m and pit [228] 1.65m below (235). During the course of the excavation, it was necessary to reduce the level of the section to allow the full depth of pit [228] to be excavated in compliance with safe working practice. For this reason also, a series of baulks remained in place and this reduced the area of pit [206] that could be investigated. The



presence of gas piping in the N-facing section of the area prevented the removal of part of the upper fills of pit [206].



Plate 1: View S showing trench post-excavation



Plate 2: View S showing Pit [206]

The primary fill of pit [206] was a loose light brown silty sand containing occasional clay pipe and post-medieval CBM (212) (**Fig. 8**). Overlying (212) was loose orange sand with occasional small patches of sandy silt (211), which was overlaid by (210), a loose mid brown silty sand containing a single fragment of bone. Overlying (210) was a loose light orange and red sand with occasional charcoal flecks (209).





Plate 3: View W showing Pit [206]



Plate 4: View W Pit [228] showing E-facing section prior to its reduction

The primary fill of pit [228] consisted of moderately compact dark orangey-brown silty sand (230) (**Fig. 6**). Unfortunately, no finds were recovered from this material. Overlying (230) was a moderately compacted greyish-brown silty sandy clay with very occasional charcoal flecking and occasional angular stones (223)/(229), which was overlaid by (238), a loose orange sand. Overlying (238) was loose orange and mid brown sand and silty sand with occasional sub-rounded stones and charcoal flecks (237), which was overlaid by (226), a loose to moderately compact light orangey-brown sand. Context (226) was overlaid by loose orange sand (236) that was in turn overlaid by (221), a substantial layer of ash containing moderate amounts of charcoal, charcoal flecking and occasional clay pipe, pottery and bone. This deposit extended above the top of the pit (**Fig. 12**).



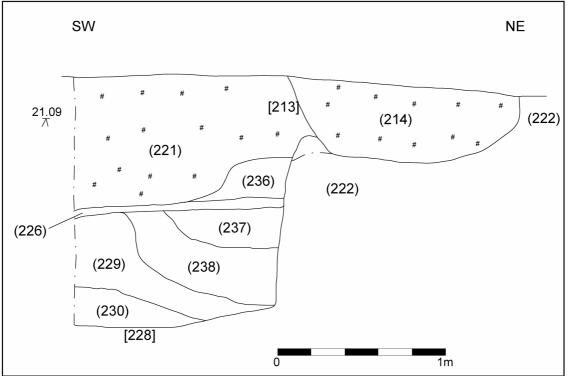


Fig. 6: SE-facing section showing pit [228]

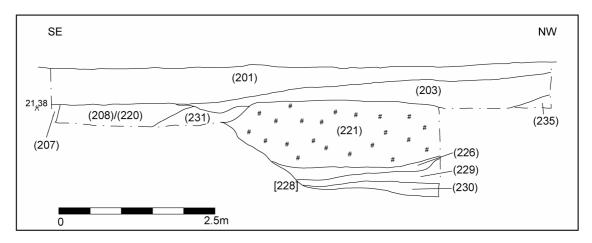


Fig. 7: NE-facing section

Overlying (221), at the interface between pits [206] and [228], was a loose greyish-orange silty sand with very occasional charcoal flecking (231) (**Fig. 7**). This appeared only in section and its precise relationship with deposits in [206] was not determined, although it appeared also to be part of the fill of this feature. Filling both pits and overlying (231) was a loose mid brown silty sand with occasional charcoal flecks, post-medieval pottery, clay pipe, CBM and bone (208)/(220) (**Figs. 7, 8 & 12**). This deposit was overlaid by a loose to moderately compact grey mortar with frequent roof tile and CBM (207). Overlying (207) was (203) (see Phase 3 below).



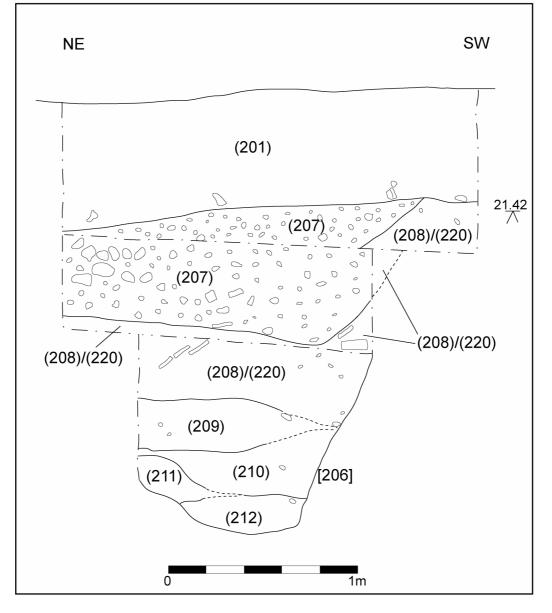


Fig. 8: NW-facing section

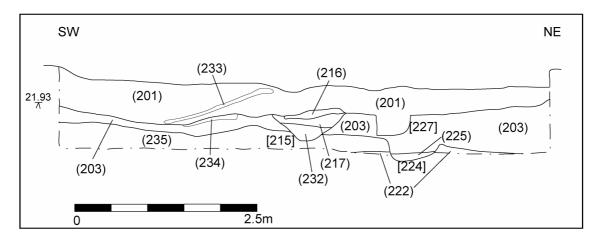


Fig. 9: SE-facing section





Plate 5: View W showing pit [228] after E-facing section reduction and at final excavation depth



Plate 6: View S showing feature [224]



To the E of these pits was a linear feature [224] which ran N–S across the trench and cut into (235) (**Plate 6; Figs. 9, 10 & 12**). Filling this feature were two deposits. The primary fill was a 0.12m-thick loose to moderately compacted mid orange to greyish-brown sandy silt with moderate medium sub-rounded stones and very occasional bone (225). Overlying (225), and filling the upper half of linear [224], was context (203) (see Phase 3 below).

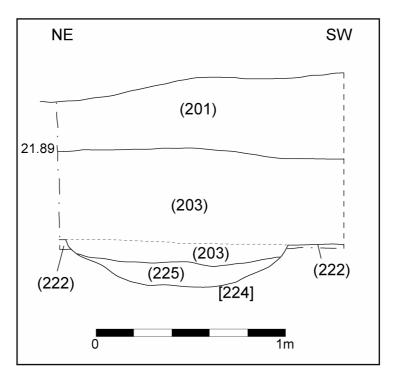


Fig. 10: Profile showing ditch [224]

Cut [202], which was identified during the evaluation as a shallow sub-circular feature, was revealed as a simple shallow scoop filled with overlying soil (203). No further finds were located within the fill to add to the two pieces of slag recovered during the evaluation phase.

5.3 Phase 3

This phase was represented by context (203), a loose to moderately compacted mid brown silty sand with occasional small pebbles, very occasional slag and occasional post-medieval CBM (**Plate 7; Fig. 11**). For the most part, this deposit was clean and lacking inclusions. The western side of the trench (203) had been heavily impacted by demolition activity, with a considerable amount of demolition material having been crushed/pressed into what in this area was quite a shallow deposit.





Plate 7: View E showing W-facing section (203)

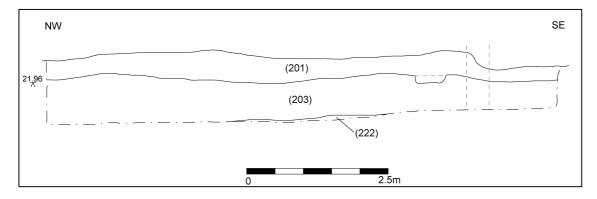


Fig. 11: SW-facing section

5.4 Phase 4

Phase 4 was represented by a series of features associated with 20th century and recent demolition activity. These included features [213], [215] and [204], all of which cut into deposit (203) (**Fig. 12**). Pit [215] was a sub-rectangular feature identified during the evaluation phase and contained three fills. The primary fill was loose light greyish-brown sandy silt (232), which was overlaid by loose dark brown sandy silt (217). Overlying (217) was a band of loose orange sand (216), which filled the upper part of the pit. Cutting [216] was [213], a sub-rectangular pit filled with loose dark brown sandy silt containing frequent post-medieval CBM and occasional post-medieval pottery, clay pipe and plastic (214). Cutting (214) was a modern machine excavated pit [204] filled with loose dark brown sandy silt containing moderate CBM and occasional plastic, post-medieval pottery and clay pipe (205). All of these features were recorded during the evaluation phase. Overlying (201), at the northern end of the trench, was loose light orange sand (234), which probably formed part of the same deposition phase, and a small rectangular cut [227] filled by (201).



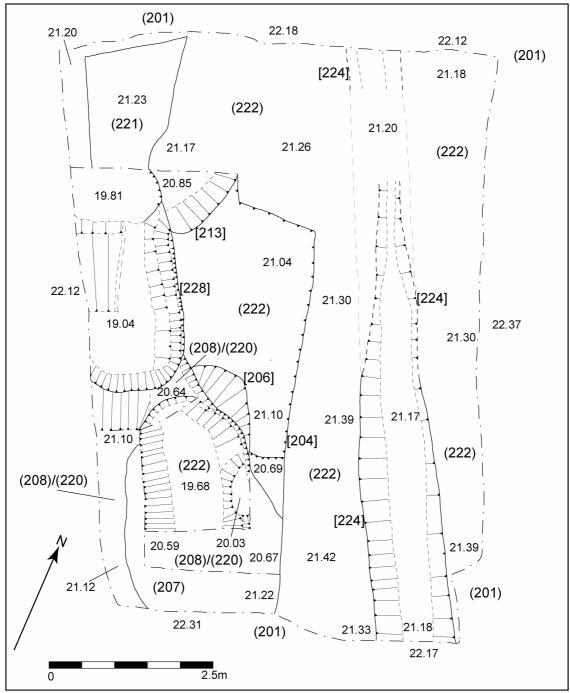


Fig. 12: Post-excavation plan

6. Interpretation

6.1 Phase 2 Features

Pits [206] and [228] appear to have been associated with sand extraction and almost identical features were found during an evaluation carried out by Worcester County Archaeological Service at Sansome Place in 2000, which were interpreted as sand and gravel extraction pits (Miller *et al* 2000). The backfill material within [206] and [228], comprising 17th to 18th century brick and tile, pottery, clay pipe and glass, was also similar to that revealed at Sansome



Place. The present site, however, appeared to relate specifically to the extraction of sand and the pits appeared to be located within a band of cleaner, less gravelly sand. To the east of the pits, towards Sansome Walk, the proportion of gravel to sand increased and the base of the pits coincided with the increasing incidence of harder natural geology within the sand.

Linear feature [224] appeared to be a boundary ditch probably delineating garden plots present on the site prior to the 18^{th} century.

6.2 Phase 3

Context (203) may have been the remains of a cultivation soil, although the material surviving modern demolition activity was at its thickest along the Sansome Walk frontage; it is thus difficult to come to a firm conclusion regarding the nature of this deposit. It is possible that the material represents an imported or re-deposited soil relating to construction activity on the site.

6.3 Phase 4 Features

The features in Phase 4 appear to relate entirely to 20th century and recent demolition activity. Most of the features from Phase 4 were located during the evaluation phase.

7. Conclusion

The excavation has confirmed that feature [206] formed part of a large, deep post-medieval pit. In conjunction with [228], it appears to have represented sand extraction activity and can probably be regarded as contemporary with the sand/mineral extraction pits previously identified by Worcester County Council Archaeological Service in Sansome Place. Both pits appear to be of early to mid post-medieval date, with clay pipe and CBM being recovered from the primary fill in [206].

The excavation also revealed a linear ditch [224] running N–S along the eastern boundary of the site. This appeared to be a boundary ditch probably demarcating plots shown in this area on both Dougharty's and Young's plans of Worcester. No material adequate dating material was recovered from the ditch but the map evidence suggests an early post-medieval origin.

8. Copyright

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9. Bibliography & Cartography

9.1 Bibliography

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Miller, D., Dalwood, H., Bryant, V., 2000, *Evaluation at Sansome Place* Archaeological Service, Worcester County Council Report 720 - WCM100522

Stratford, T., 1835, The City and Suburbs of Worcester

Woodiwiss, S., 1997, *Evaluation at 16 Sansome Street, Worcester* Archaeological Service, Worcester County Council Report 536 – WCM24482

9.2 Cartography

- 1610 Speed's Plan of Worcester
- 1660 Civil War Plan of Worcester (based on Speed's 1610)
- 1741-2 Dougharty's Plan of Worcester City
- 1779 Young's Plan of Worcester city and suburbs
- 1781 Young's Plan of Worcester city and suburbs
- 1891 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6-inch map
- 1930 Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition 6-inch map
- 1938 Ordnance Survey Provisional 6-inch map
- 1953 Ordnance Survey Provisional 6-inch map



10. APPENDIX 1: Context register

Note: This trench uses the context numbering system assigned to evaluation Trench 2.

CONTEXT	INTERPRETATION			
(201)	Loose dark greyish-brown silty sand. Frequent CBM, brick small, medium and large stones. Moderate slate tiles. Occasional clay pipe stems. Dimensions: > 9 x > 8 x 0.3m.			
INTERPRETATION:	Demolition rubble from GPO building clearance.			
[202]	t – Shape in plan: Appears roughly circular (not fully within trench). Corners: unded. Dimensions: 2 x 1.5 x 0.35m. Break of slope top: Gentle. Sides: Gently ping. Break of slope base: Gentle. Base: Very slightly concave. Filled by: 03).			
INTERPRETATION:	Shallow pit of indeterminate period.			
(203)	osely to moderately compacted mid brown silty sand. Occasional small bbles. Two pieces of slag. Dimensions: > 9 x > 8 x 0.35m.			
INTERPRETATION:	Garden soil at site frontage.			
[204]	Cut – Shape in plan: Roughly sub-rectangular. Corners: Roughly at a right angle. Dimensions: 3.5 x 3 x 0.45m. Break of slope top: Sharp. Sides: Vertical. Break of slope base: Right angle. Base: Roughly flat with slight slop to west. Orientation: NW–SE. Filled by: (205).			
INTERPRETATION: Modern mechanical excavation.				
(205)	bose dark brown sandy silt. Moderate CBM. Occasional plastic, post-medieval ottery and clay pipe. Dimensions: 3.5 x 3 x 0.45m.			
INTERPRETATION:	Modern backfill of mechanical excavation.			
[206]	Cut – Shape in plan: Roughly circular. Dimensions: > 3.5 x > 2.5 x 1.6m. Break of slope top: Sharp. Sides: Gentle slope to ½ of depth, steeply sloping from this point to base. Break of slope base: Moderate. Base: Undulating. Filled by: (207), (208), (209), (210), (211), (212).			
INTERPRETATION:	Cut of large pit of probable post-medieval date.			
(207)	Moderately compacted grey mortar. Occasional roof tile and mortar lumps. Dimensions: 2.4 x 1.7 x 0.6m.			
INTERPRETATION:	Uppermost fill of pit [206].			
(208)	Loose dark brown sandy silt. Occasional charcoal flecks, post-medieval CBM, pottery and clay pipe. Dimensions: > $1.5 \times 2.8 \times 2.5 \times 1.5 \times$			
INTERPRETATION:	Post-medieval tipping deposit.			
(209)	Loose light orangey-red sand. Occasional charcoal flecks. Dimensions: 2.5 x 1.7 x 0.26m.			
INTERPRETATION:	Sand tipping lense.			
(210)	Loose mid brown silty sand. One fragment of bone. Dimensions: 2 x 1.2 x < 0.35m.			
INTERPRETATION:	Tipping fill.			
(211)	Loose orange sand. Occasional small patches of sandy silt. Dimensions: $0.8 \times 0.6 \times 0.25$ m.			
INTERPRETATION:	Secondary fill of pit [206].			
(212)	Loose light brown silty sand. Occasional post-medieval CBM and clay pipe. Dimensions: 2 x 0.6 x 0.2m.			
INTERPRETATION:	Primary fill of pit [206].			

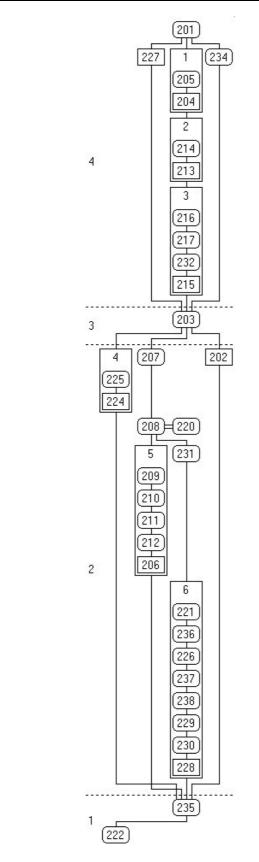


	ARCHAEOLO		
[213]	Cut – Shape in plan: Probably originally circular but heavily truncated by [204].		
	Corners: Removed by later cut [204]. Dimensions: 3.6 x 0.6 x 0.5m. Break of		
	slope top: Appears sharp. Sides: Concave. Break of slope base: Gentle. Base:		
	Concave. Orientation: Unclear due to truncation by [204]. Truncated by [204].		
	Filled by (214).		
INTERPRETATION:	Cut of late post-medieval pit.		
(214) Loose dark brown sandy silt. Frequent post-medieval CBM. Occasion			
	medieval pottery and clay pipe. Dimensions: 3.6 x 0.6 x 0.5m.		
INTERPRETATION:	Modern fill of pit [213].		
[215]	Cut – Shape in plan: Appears roughly circular, but heavily truncated.		
	Dimensions: 0.8 x 0.5 x 0.4m. Break of slope top: Appears sharp. Sides: Steeply		
	sloping. Break of slope base: Not excavated. Base: Not Excavated. Orientation:		
	Not defined. Truncated by: [213]. Filled by: (216), (217).		
INTERPRETATION:	Post-medieval pit cut.		
(216)	Loose orange sand. Dimensions: 0.8 x 0.4 x 0.1m.		
INTERPRETATION:	Tertiary fill of pit [215].		
(217)	Loose mid brown sandy silt. Dimensions: 0.8 x > 0.6 x 0.2m.		
INTERPRETATION:	Fill (primary?) of pit [215].		
(218)	VOID.		
(219)	VOID.		
(220)	Loose mid brown silty sand. Occasional charcoal flecks, CBM, pottery, glass, clay		
	pipe and bone. Dimensions: $> 3 \times > 1 \times 0.4 m$.		
INTERPRETATION:	Fill of pit [206].		
(221)	Loose ash and mortar. Occasional clay pipe, post-medieval pottery. Very		
()	occasional glass. Dimensions: Trench wide x 1m.		
INTERPRETATION:	Domestic ash pit waste fill of pit [206].		
(222)	Loose orange brown sand. Occasional pebbles. Dimensions: Trench wide x 1m		
INTERPRETATION:	Natural sand		
(223)	Now (229)		
[224]	Cut – Shape in plan: Linear. Dimensions: 9.0 x 1.26 x 0.24m. Break of slope top:		
[]	Moderate to sharp. Sides: Gradually sloping. Break of slope base: Gradual. Base:		
	Concave. Orientation: N–S. Filled by: (225), (203).		
INTERPRETATION:	Ditch.		
(225)	Loose to moderately compact mid orangey-grey brown sandy silt. Frequent		
(223)	medium sub-rounded stones. Very occasional bone. Dimensions: 9 x 1.26 x		
	0.12m.		
INTERPRETATION:	Fill of [224].		
(226)	Loose to moderately compacted light orangey-brown sand. Dimensions: 2.64 x		
(220)	1.3 x 0.06m.		
INTERPRETATION:	Re-deposited natural filling [228].		
[227]	Cut – Shape in plan: Sub-circular. Dimensions: 0.5 x 0.24 x 0.36m. Break of slope		
[227]	top: Sharp. Sides: Vertical to very steeply sloping. Break of slope base: Sharp.		
	Base: Flat. Filled by (201).		
INTERPRETATION:	Modern demolition related feature.		
[228]	Cut – Shape in plan: Sub - rectangular. Corners: Rounded. Dimensions: > 3 x		
[220]	>1.5 x 2.m. Break of slope top: Moderate. Sides: Steeply sloping: Break of slope		
	base: Stepped. Base: Sloping to W and to N. Orientated: N–S. Filled by (220),		
	(221), (226), (229), (230).		
INTERPRETATION:	Cut of sand extraction pit.		
(229)	Moderately compacted greyish-brown silty sandy clay. Very occasional charcoal		
(223)	flecks. Occasional angular stones. Dimensions: 2.34 x 1.21 x 0.46m.		
INTERPRETATION:	Secondary fill of [228]		
	Moderately compacted dark orangey-brown silty sand. Dimensions: 2.08 x 0.76		
(230)			
	x 0.26m.		

Loose greyish-orange silty sand. Very occasional charcoal flecks. Dimensions:			
1.6 x > 0.05 x 0.3m.			
Fill of either [206] or [228].			
Loose to moderately compacted light greyish-brown sandy silt. Dimensions:			
0.68 x 0.62 x 0.24m.			
Primary fill of [215].			
VOID			
Loose light orange sand. Dimensions: 1.4 x 1 x 0.08m.			
Tipping deposit associated with demolition activity.			
Loose mid orange sand. Frequent darker brown patches. Dimensions: Trench			
wide x 0.38m.			
Dirty natural (disturbed by worm and root activity).			
Loose orange sand. Dimensions: 0.8 x 0.6 x < 0.25.			
Sandy backfill of [228].			
Loose orange and mid brown sand and silty sand. Occasional sub-rounded			
stones and charcoal flecks. Dimensions: 0.65 x 0.45 x 0.23m.			
Tipping deposit in [228].			
Loose orange sand. Dimensions: 0.9 x 0.54 x 0.3m.			
Tipping deposit within [228].			



11. APPENDIX 2: Site matrix





Document Control

Job title	Archaeological Excavation: Former GPO Building Sansome Walk Worcester Worcestershire	Job No	BA0804SVMBSWW
Report written by	Thomas Wellicome BSc AIFA		
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	George Children MA MIFA		
Issue No	Status	Date	Approved for issue
1	Final	February 2008	Neil Shurety