

26 & 28 Nicholas Street Chester Cheshire



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Report EH109/03**

26 & 28 Nicholas Street Chester, Cheshire

Archaeological Evaluation For PWA Planning

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Heritage Impact Assessment
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment
Historic Landscape Survey
Written Scheme of Investigation

Geophysical Survey
Trial Trench Evaluation
Archaeological Excavation
Archaeological Watching Briefs

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The archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Martin Railton, Eden Heritage Ltd assisted by Kevin Mounsey, Senior Project Assistant. The report was also produced and illustrated by Martin Railton.

Summary

In May 2021 Eden Heritage was commissioned by PWA Planning to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land at the rear of 26 & 28 Nicholas Street, Chester, Cheshire (centred on National Grid Reference SJ 4028 6609). The archaeological evaluation was required to help determine the archaeological potential of the area and to inform the proposed development at the site. The proposed development will involve the extension, alteration and conversion of former office buildings and associated outbuildings to create an aparthotel. In addition, the proposals include erection of 3 no. apartments on a former car park off Nicholas Street Mews.

This part of Chester is known to have been the site of an extensive settlement during the Roman period, which lay between the western defences of the Roman fort and the River Dee. In the medieval period the site was also partially within the area of a Dominican Friary (Blackfriars). The site also lies within Chester's Area of Archaeological Importance as defined in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979). It also lies on the boundary between Archaeological Character Zone 15 (Nicholas Street) and Zone 29 (Cuppin Street), as defined in the Chester Archaeological Plan, which forms part of the Evidence Base for the Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Plan. These are both Primary Zones, where remains of National Significance are likely to occur.

The evaluation was undertaken between the 4th and 6th May 2021, with three 1.5m-long by 1.5m-wide trenches excavated across the proposed development area. The trenches were located to target aspects of the proposed development, including the location of a proposed extension to the rear of 26 & 28 Nicholas Street, and the new apartments on Nicholas Street Mews. Similar deposits were identified at depth in each of the excavated trenches, comprising a layer of compacted yellow/grey silty clay, within which were red sandstone cobbles. A possible wall foundation was also identified which, combined with the discovery of Roman tile from its surface, indicates the possible presence of a demolished Roman building or associated structure. In each of the trenches the potential Roman deposits were identified at a depth over 1.0m below ground level covered by a significant accumulation of soils containing animal bone, shell, CBM and pottery, which probably reflect agricultural use or garden activity in the medieval and post-medieval periods.

An assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the level of identified archaeological remains has indicated that there will a minimal impact overall. This impact will be limited to the insertion of concrete piles for the extension to the rear of 26 & 28 Nicholas Street, which will amount to 4% of the total area.

1 Introduction

1.1 Project Circumstances

- 1.1.1 In May 2021 Eden Heritage was commissioned by PWA Planning to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land at the rear of 26 & 28 Nicholas Street, Chester, Cheshire (centred on National Grid Reference SJ 4028 6609). The archaeological evaluation was required to help determine the archaeological potential of the area and to inform the proposed development at the site.
- 1.1.2 The proposed development area is to the west of Chester city centre, on the west side of Nicholas Street, being south of Watergate Street and north of Grey Friars (Figure 1). The proposed development will involve the extension, alteration and conversion of former office buildings and associated outbuildings to create an aparthotel comprising of up to 54 no. residential apartments, 6 no. mews cottages, outdoor terrace and a self-contained restaurant. In addition, the proposals include erection of 3 no. apartments on a former car park off Nicholas Street Mews (Figure 2).
- 1.1.3 This part of Chester is known to have been the site of an extensive settlement during the Roman period, which lay between the western defences of the Roman fort and the River Dee. In the medieval period the site lay within the area of a Dominican Friary (Blackfriars). The site also lies within Chester's Area of Archaeological Importance as defined in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979). It also lies on the boundary between Archaeological Character Zone 15 (Nicholas Street) and Zone 29 (Cuppin Street), as defined in the Chester Archaeological Plan, which forms part of the Evidence Base for the Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Plan. These are both Primary Zones, where remains of National Significance are likely to occur.
- 1.1.4 An archaeological desk-based assessment confirmed that there is a high potential for archaeological remains within the site dating to the Roman and medieval periods. The western portion of the proposed development area lies within that part of Chester which is known to have been the site of an extensive settlement during the Roman period (*canabae*). The western portion of the site also lay within the precinct of the Dominican Friary in the medieval period; the precinct boundary apparently bisecting the east side of the proposed development area (Eden Heritage 2021a).
- 1.1.5 As a result, Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service (CAPAS) advised that an archaeological evaluation was required to support the planning application, in order to determine the presence/absence and depth of archaeological deposits within the proposed development area. This is in line with government advice as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG 2019) and the Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Plan (Cheshire West and Chester Council 2015).

2 Methodology

2.1 Written Scheme of Investigation

2.1.1 A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by Eden Heritage for an archaeological trial trench evaluation, which was designed to provide information regarding the potential for buried archaeological remains within the proposed development area (Eden Heritage 2021b). The WSI was submitted to Mark Leah, Development Management Archaeologist and Team Leader at Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service for approval, prior to the commencement of the project.

2.2 Documentary Research

2.2.1 An archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken in February 2021 (Eden Heritage 2021a). The research focused on evidence for potential archaeological remains at the site and was undertaken in accordance with the recommendations of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in *Standards and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk-based Assessments* (CIfA 2020a).

2.2.2 This involved consultation of the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (HER), The National Archives, Eden Heritage library and other online sources for historic maps and documents relating to the site.

2.3 Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation

2.3.1 The archaeological evaluation was undertaken following the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation (2020b).

2.3.2 The evaluation comprised the excavation 6.75m² of land in total, focusing on the areas of the proposed development. This involved the excavation of three 1.5m by 1.5m trenches in total (Figure 2). Two trenches were located within the proposed extension to the rear of 26 & 28 Nicholas Street (T1 and T2) and a the third was at Nicholas Street Mews carpark (T3). The trenches were placed to sample the areas of the proposed development, avoiding known services and modern obstructions. The general aims of these investigations were:

- to establish the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains and to record these where they were observed;
- to establish the character of those features in terms of cuts, soil matrices and interfaces;
- to assess the impact of the proposed development on the archaeological site;
- to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes;
- to recover palaeoenvironmental material where it survives in order to understand site and landscape formation processes.

2.3.3 Deposits considered not to be significant were removed by a tracked excavator with a toothless

ditching bucket, under close archaeological supervision. The trial trenches were subsequently cleaned by hand. All possible features were inspected, and selected deposits were excavated by hand to retrieve artefactual material. Once completed all features were recorded in accordance with the Museum of London Archaeological Service Archaeological Site Manual (Museum of London 1994). A metal detector was utilised to maximise the collection of metal artefacts from the excavated spoil, in accordance with the Treasure Act 1996 Code of Practice.

2.3.4 All finds encountered were retained on site and returned to the Eden Heritage Ltd office where they were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* was then produced for each stratified context, and the dates were used to help determine the broad date phases for the site.

2.3.5 On completion of the project, the finds were cleaned and packaged according to standard guidelines. Please note, the following categories of material will be discarded following the submission of this report within 6 months, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository):

- unstratified material of no research value;
- modern pottery;
- material that has been assessed as having no obvious grounds for retention.

2.3.6 On completion the evaluation trenches were reinstated replacing the excavated material.

2.3.7 The fieldwork programme was followed by an assessment of the data as set out in the *Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2020b) and the *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2020c).

2.4 Project Archive

2.4.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (Eden Heritage 2021), and the Archaeological Archives Forum recommendations (Brown 2011). It is anticipated that the archive will be deposited with the Grosvenor Museum, Chester.

2.4.2 Eden Heritage and Cumbria County Council support the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) project. This project aims to provide an online index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature created as a result of developer-funded archaeological fieldwork. As a result, details of the results of this study will be made available by Eden Heritage as a part of this project, and a copy of the report will be uploaded to the OASIS website within 3 months following approval by Cumbria County Council (Reference **edenheri1-422101**).

3 Background

3.1 Location and Geological Context

- 3.1.1 Chester is a city within Cheshire West and Chester unitary authority, located approximately 25km south of Liverpool in Cheshire. The city is situated on the River Dee, close to the border with Wales. Nicholas Street (A5268) is a dual carriageway which lies to the west of Chester city centre and forms part of the city centre ring road to the north of Grosvenor Roundabout (Figure 1).
- 3.1.2 The proposed development area encompasses No.s 26 & 28 Nicholas Street, which are situated on the west side of the street, bounded by Grey Friars to the south (Figure 2). The 1483m² site is currently occupied by office buildings fronting onto Nicholas Street, with two further building ranges extending to the rear to form a courtyard, with access from Grey Friars. No.3 Nicholas Street Mews and a row of single-story outbuildings are located to the rear of the property. The land within the site is predominantly level with an average elevation of c.20m aOD (above Ordnance Datum).
- 3.1.3 In addition, a c.243m² area of land measuring on the west side of Nicholas Street Mews is also included within the development proposals. This area is currently a private car park with access from Nicholas Street Mews. This area is under tarmac and has an average elevation of c.19m aOD.
- 3.1.4 The geology of the site is sandstone (gravelly), known as Chester Formation. This sedimentary bedrock formed 247 to 250 million years ago in the Triassic Period. No superficial deposits are recorded (BGS 2021).

3.2 Historic Background

- 3.2.1 The site is located within The Chester and Broughton Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI) as defined in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979). In addition, the site lies on the boundary of Archaeological Character Zone 15: Nicholas Street and Zone 9: Cuppin Street as defined in the Chester Archaeological Plan, which forms the basis of the archaeological strategy in Chester. The eastern part of the proposed development area is within the Cuppin Street archaeological character zone. Prior to the medieval period, this area formed the southwest corner of the Roman fortress at Chester incorporating the line of the southern and western defences. The street layout is thought to have its origin in the Roman period based on the inner fortress road and extra mural road outside of the defences (Cheshire Archaeology 2021, Character Zone 9). The western part of the proposed development area and the area of land on the west side of Nicholas Street Mews are both within the Nicholas Street archaeological character zone, which is defined primarily by the presence of three substantial medieval religious houses, situated together on the edge of the city's historic core. During the Roman period, the area was part of the civilian settlement outside the fortress, oriented around a port (Cheshire Archaeology 2021, Character Zone 15).

- 3.2.2 The fortress of *Deva* was established around AD 74 in Chester and, together with York, was one of the most important centres for the Roman military in the north of Britain, being home to an imperial legion for more than 300 years (Mason 2012, 11). The projected layout of the fortress at Chester is based in part on known archaeological evidence as well as studies of the expected design of Roman fortresses. The perimeter of the fortress incorporated the fortress defences as well as a strip of land between the defences and the buildings of the fortress – this was known as the *intervallum* and incorporated space for ovens and rampart buildings as well as the *intervallum* road. The proposed development area is located outside of the western fort defences, which are believed to have aligned with the east side of Nicholas Street.
- 3.2.3 The proposed development area is located in the vicinity of the Roman civilian settlement (*canabae*) which grew up beside the fortress and is believed to have extended from to the west of the fort to the river, where there was a natural harbour. It is understood that in later periods there would have been a patrol track along the outer edge of the fort ditch, and civilian structures were kept from encroaching too close to the defences. On the west side of the fort the width of this zone south of Watergate Street was 50m (Mason 2012, 109). This suggests that the western half of the proposed development area was within the area of the civilian settlement. The earliest cemeteries were located along the approach roads beyond the built-up areas and in the open areas around the fortress (Ibid., 110). The eastern portion of the proposed development area could therefore potentially contain human remains associated with the Roman occupation of Chester.
- 3.2.4 In the medieval period the Chester became the largest and most prosperous urban centre in the North West with a diverse economy, with trade, gold-smithing and leatherworking among its important commercial activities (CAPAS 2014, 8). The town was re-fortified by the Normans who built a new castle in the south-west corner of the city in the late 11th century, located approximately 200m to the south of the proposed development area. The city walls were also improved in the mid-12th century, following the present-day Nuns Road to the west of the site.
- 3.2.5 The Dominican friars, were the first major monastic order to establish themselves at Chester, founding their house c.1237 – 1238 under the patronage of Alexander de Stavensby, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. Other sources suggest there is evidence that Henry III founded the friary and that it was under royal patronage. They were granted a large block of land bound by Watergate Street to the north, Nicholas Street to the east, Blackfriars to the south and the route of the city walls to the west. The precinct of the Dominican Friary (Asset 16) occupied most of the block of land bounded by Lower Watergate Street, the City Walls, Black Friars and Nicholas Street, of which the latter two streets record the presence of the friars and the dedication of their church to St Nicholas.
- 3.2.6 Interpretation maps of medieval Chester in c.1500 indicate that the proposed development area lies partly within the monastic precinct. A small amount of secular settlement was also believed to have been located just outside the Dominican Friary precinct, facing Nicholas Street (Cheshire

Archaeology 2021, Character Zone 15). Part of what is assumed to have been the precinct boundary wall was excavated in the 1974/75 during excavations at 30-42 Nicholas Street, and immediately east of this wall was a c.1.5m wide pebbled pathway, with two consecutive surfaces. The path was presumably connected in some way to the friary boundary wall, as it ran right outside it. A wall, possibly part of the precinct boundary of the Dominican friary, was also identified during a watching brief at the eastern end of Grey Friars, running into Nicholas Street. The wall appeared to curve slightly, and therefore may have been the outer face of a well or tower. This work suggests that the precinct boundary wall and pathway would have also crossed the east side of the development area.

- 3.2.7 Following Dissolution of the Monasteries around 1539, the nunnery and friaries in Chester were forcibly disbanded and their lands and wealth confiscated by the King (CAPAS 2014, 8). The properties were subsequently sold to prominent citizens, who tended to convert the complexes into private residences. The street called Grey Friars is believed to have been laid out following the Dissolution, when the site of the former monastery had been given over to various new owners. The earliest map consulted during the assessment which showed the proposed development area in detail was Lavaux's 1745 Map of Chester, which depicts the site located within the City Walls with Nicholas Street to the west. The proposed development area is shown as being developed, although no further detail is provided on this map. The portion of the site located on Nicholas Street Mews is depicted within an area of garden plots (Eden Heritage 2021a, 14).
- 3.2.8 The 18th century saw an influx of wealthy landed families, migrating from their estates to town houses in the city, attracted by social activities, including the races. Town houses constructed to the west of the city, included those in the vicinity of the proposed development area. Nos 26 & 28 Nicholas Street form part of a terrace of former town houses, constructed in the 1780s. No.3 Nicholas Street Mews was built within the current site boundary in the early 19th century as a coachman's cottage, with coach houses and stable (Eden Heritage 2021a, 15).

3.3 Previous Archaeological Work

- 3.3.1 Information obtained from the Cheshire Historic Environment Record indicates that there has been one previous archaeological investigation undertaken within the proposed development area. This comprised a trial trench evaluation undertaken in 2018 at No.3 Nicholas Street Mews. Three trenches were excavated at the property, comprising two to the rear and one inside. A brick culvert or cistern was located at the rear of the property in Trench 1 at a depth of 1.7m. Also, to the rear Trench 2 revealed no archaeological features and reached the natural clay geology at 2.15m blg.
- 3.3.2 The north-east corner of a basement was exposed in Trench 3 and measured in excess of 0.7m north-south and over 1.5m east-west, extending beyond the confines of the trench. The basement was c.0.60m deep and comprised six courses of dressed, red sandstone masonry, some re-used architectural fragments with ovolo mouldings and grey-painted surfaces, and a sandstone flagged

floor surface. A ceramic drainpipe was incorporated within the eastern wall, which may have served as an overflow in case of flooding. The structure had been backfilled with loose, crushed lime mortar. To the west, it had been truncated by the brick footings of the current property. Immediately to the north of the basement structure, was a thin deposit (0.10m) of orange sand and crushed red sandstone, which probably represented levelling for a floor contemporary with the basement.

- 3.3.3 Significantly the basement was found to cut into deep soil deposits extending to a depth of c.2m below ground level and overlying the natural clay. These soil deposits were dated by finds to the early post-medieval period (16th/17th century) and were thought to reflect agricultural or garden soils that accumulated following the dissolution of the former Dominican Friary (Earthwork Archaeological Services 2018).
- 3.3.4 In 1988 an archaeological excavation was undertaken to the rear of properties on the west side of Nicholas Street Mews, immediately to the north of the proposed development area. A complex series of Roman deposits was revealed dating from the late first century through to the third century with structural evidence possibly surviving into the medieval period. The earliest evidence of Roman activity at Nicholas Street Mews comprised a sandstone rubble surface at the northern end of the trench resting on the natural deposits. The dating evidence suggests it related to the late first to early second century. At the southern end of the trench, there was evidence of a disturbed soil layer suggesting site clearance or levelling. Fragmentary remains of a timber structure of possible second century date were also found in the southern part of the trench although damage had been caused to it by the construction of a wall and two stone-lined pits during the late medieval period. A Roman stone wall and substantial surface were also revealed dating to the first half of the second century. Much of the remains had been disturbed by medieval and later activity, but a building with possible hypocaust is believed to have been present at the site. Roman remains were encountered at a depth of c.1.6m (Ward 2012).

4 Evaluation Results

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The evaluation was undertaken between the 4th and 6th May 2021, with three 1.5m-long by 1.5m-wide trenches (T1-3) excavated across the proposed development area (Figure 2). The trenches were located to target aspects of the proposed development, including the location of a proposed extension to the rear of 26 & 28 Nicholas Street, and the new apartments on Nicholas Street Mews.
- 4.1.2 Modern tarmac was present across both areas, relating to their previous uses as car parks. These surfaces measured approximately 0.1m deep, and were removed by machine, along with the associated hard core/bedding material for the two car parks. At 26 & 28 Nicholas Street this overlaid modern made ground and a depth of post-medieval soil. At Nicholas Street Mews a similar depth of post-medieval soil was revealed along with the outer wall of a post-medieval building.
- 4.1.3 Archaeological deposits were revealed in all three trenches, which potentially dated to the Roman period. These included a possible wall foundation to the rear of 26 & 28 Nicholas Street (Plate 1). Once the depth of significant archaeology was reached, the trenches were recorded and backfilled. No further excavation was undertaken, and natural geology was not identified in any of the trenches.



Plate 1: Location of the trenches at 26 & 28 Nicholas Street (T1 & T2), looking southeast

4.2 Results

- 4.2.1 *Trench 1:* T1 was situated on the southeast side of the carpark behind 26 & 28 Nicholas Street (Figure 2). The trench was excavated to an overall depth of 1.3m, with the additional excavation of a 0.7m square *sondage* at the southeast corner, which extended the total depth to 1.7m (Figure 3; Plate 2).

- 4.2.2 A deposit of yellow/grey silty clay (**106**) was identified at a depth of 1.7m below ground level (blg) in T1, within which were a number of very degraded red sandstone cobbles forming a possible surface (at 16.46m aOD). Above this was 0.4m of grey/brown silty clay (**105**), which containing fragments of medieval pottery and ceramic building material (CBM), and a similar deposit of grey/brown silty clay (**104**), which measured between 0.4m and 0.6m deep. The latter deposit contained frequent fragments of animal bone, charcoal, medieval and post-medieval pottery, clay pipe and CBM.
- 4.2.3 Covering this soil in the southwest corner of the trench was a 0.3m-deep dumped deposit of black sandy silt (**103**) containing occasional small, rounded stones and charcoal fragments. Overlying this was 0.15m of friable red/orange sand (**102**) containing crushed brick and numerous CBM fragments.
- 4.2.4 Above this deposit was 0.25m of made-ground comprising yellow/brown silty clay (**101**) containing fragments of modern red brick and lenses of clay. Above this layer was the foundation for the carpark which comprised 0.1m of modern manufactured brick and concrete (**100**) with mortar throughout.



Plate 2: North-facing section of T1 showing *sondage*, looking south (1m scale)

- 4.2.5 *Trench 2*: T2 was also located behind 26 & 28 Nicholas Street, being situated 6m to the southeast of T1 (Figure 2). This trench was excavated to an overall depth of 1.2m blg (Figure 4; Plate 3).
- 4.2.6 A deposit of compacted yellow/grey silty clay (**205**) was revealed on the west side of the trench, within which were frequent rounded red sandstone cobbles measuring up to 0.08m in diameter, forming part of a possible surface (Figure 4; Plate 4). A similar deposit of compacted yellow/grey silty clay (**208**) measuring 0.2m wide was revealed on the eastern edge of the trench which may related. Between these two surfaces was a raised deposit of compacted yellow/grey silty clay (**207**), crossing the trench aligned northwest to southeast, which was interpreted as a possible wall foundation. This measured approximately 0.6m wide and 0.12m high and contained frequent rounded red sandstone pieces measuring up to 0.2m by 0.1m by 0.1m and several pieces of Roman tile were recovered from its surface (at 17.17m aOD). The clay content was noticeably higher than deposits (**205**) and (**208**).

- 4.2.7 Immediately to the west of the possible wall foundation **(207)** and overlying deposit **(205)** was a deposit of orange clay **(206)**, measuring 0.2m by 0.3m and 0.06m deep, extending outside of the trench to the northwest. All of the above deposits were covered by 0.2m of grey sandy silt **(204)**, which contained frequent fragments of red sandstone, Roman pottery, CBM and animal bone.



Plate 3: North-facing section of T2, looking south (1m scale)



Plate 4: Possible wall foundation **(207)** in T2 showing Roman tile, looking south (1m scale)

- 4.2.8 Above deposit **(204)** was a 0.3m-deep deposit of grey/brown silty clay **(203)** containing occasional small, rounded pebbles, charcoal fragments, CBM, animal bone and oyster shell. Overlying this at the southeast corner of the trench was a deposit of friable red/orange sand **(202)** containing crushed

brick, coal and post-medieval glass. Above this deposit was 0.5m of made ground comprising yellow/brown silty clay (**201**) including some lenses of redeposited clay, modern brick, slate pieces, above which was the foundation for the carpark which comprised 0.2m of modern manufactured brick, laid randomly, mixed with gravel and tarmac (**100**).

4.2.9 *Trench 3*: T3 was situated in the carpark on Nicholas Street Mews, located 41m to the west of T2 (Figure 2). This part of Nicholas Street Mews was occupied by houses from the early 19th century onwards. These were demolished prior to 2003, the site becoming a carpark (Eden Heritage 2021). This trench was excavated to an overall depth of 1.3m blg, with the additional excavation of a 0.5m square *sondage* at the southeast corner, which extended the total depth to 1.6m (Figure 3; Plate 5).

4.2.10 A deposit of yellow/grey silty clay (**306**) was identified at a depth of 1.6m blg in T3, within which were a number of red sandstone cobbles forming a probable surface (at 15.54m aOD). Filling the trench above this deposit was 0.8m of yellow/brown silty clay (**305**), which containing fragments of red sandstone, charcoal, CBM, post-medieval pottery, animal bone and slate pieces throughout.



Plate 5: North-facing section of T3 showing *sondage*, looking south (1m scale)

4.2.11 Above this deposit on the southern edge of the trench was a wall foundation (**303**) comprising a lower course of shaped red sandstone blocks up to 0.35m long by 0.18m deep, above which was a layer of smaller rounded sandstone cobbles up to 0.25m long and 0.1m deep (Plate 6). Above this were two courses of mortared red bricks (**302**) measuring 0.22m long, 0.11m wide and 0.06m deep, which had been laid randomly to create a level foundation for a red brick wall (**301**), of which three courses survived beneath the car park surface. No cut for the wall could be identified in the section.

- 4.2.12 Covering the brick wall (301) and the yellow/brown silty clay soil (305) was the foundation for the carpark which comprised 0.2m of mixed gravel hardcore (100).



Plate 6: Wall foundation in the north-facing section of T3, looking south (1m scale)

4.3 Discussion

- 4.3.1 Similar deposits were identified at depth in each of the excavated trenches, comprising a layer of compacted yellow/grey silty clay, within which were a number of red sandstone cobbles. The small scale of the excavations makes interpretation difficult, but these may have formed floor surfaces. In Trench 3 this compared with earliest evidence of Roman activity identified at Nicholas Street Mews in 1998, which comprised a sandstone rubble surface at the northern end of the trench resting on natural deposits. The dating evidence suggested this related to the late first to early second century.
- 4.3.2 The identification of a possible wall foundation in Trench 2, combined with the discovery of Roman tile from its surface, indicates the possible presence of a demolished Roman building or other structure. In each of the trenches the potential Roman deposits were identified at a depth over 1.0m blg covered by a significant accumulation of soils containing animal bone, shell, CBM and pottery, which probably reflect agricultural use or garden activity in the medieval and post-medieval periods.
- 4.3.3 The brick wall with a sandstone foundation identified in Trench 3 (301-303) almost certainly relates to one of the post-medieval buildings which are known to have occupied Nicholas Street Mews. This appears to relate to the northern outer wall to the rear of one of the properties (see Figure 2).
- 4.3.4 In Trench 1 and Trench 2 there was evidence for several single phase dumped deposits and disturbed layers/made ground suggesting site clearance or levelling had taken place, possibly associated with the construction of the adjacent 20th century extension to the Nicholas Street building.

5 Finds

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 Following the completion of the fieldwork all finds were returned to the Eden Heritage Ltd office for assessment. The vast majority of the finds were recovered from soil layers within the trenches with very few from well-stratified deposits, the exception being deposit **(204)** in Trench 2 (see Figure 4).
- 5.1.2 All finds were dealt with according to the recommendations of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard & Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (CIfA 2020c). All artefacts have been assessed according to material type and conforming to the deposition guidelines recommended by Brown (2011).
- 5.1.3 The complete finds assemblage from the trial trench evaluation is provided in Table 1 below.

5.2 Roman Pottery

- 5.2.1 A single sherd, weighing 4g, was recovered from deposit **(204)** in Trench 2. The sherd was an undecorated grey ware body sherd with a thickness of 5mm, possibly from a bowl or storage jar.
- 5.2.2 The sherd was unglazed and typical of Roman grey ware vessels associated with food and cooking. Grey ware fabrics were often made locally serving urban markets, and their use is therefore limited in terms of dating (Guy de la Bedoyere 2004, 47).
- 5.2.3 Nothing further could be gained from the analysis of the Roman pottery.

5.3 Medieval Pottery

- 5.3.1 In total 17 sherds of medieval pottery, weighing 255g, were recovered during the investigation (Table 1). The sherds were recovered from deposits **(104)** and **(105)** in Trench 1 and unstratified deposits.
- 5.3.2 The sherds were mostly body fragments and likely to be from a range of jugs, bowls and storage jars. A single unstratified rim sherd with a misfired brown glaze, and part of a base with sooting were recovered from Trench 1, most likely a cooking pot. The ceramics were typical of domestic wares.
- 5.3.3 It was noteworthy that the sherds were not particularly abraded, and it is reasonable to assume that the fragments have not moved far from the original point of deposition.
- 5.3.4 The fabrics present included gritty orange and red wares which were dominant in the North from the 12th century, continuing into the mid-13th century. Also present were partially reduced wares, some with green and brown glazes, which are typical of the 13th and 14th centuries, and some Late Medieval Reduced Grey ware, which is part of a widespread Northern Reduced Greenware tradition seen across both the North West and the North East during the 14th to 16th centuries (Laing 2003).

- 5.3.5 A range of fabric types was present in each of the contexts meaning that only a general medieval date could be ascribed to deposit **(105)** in Trench 1 based on the ceramics recovered from this layer.
- 5.3.6 The presence of residual medieval ceramic material is expected at the site, given the close the proximity to the medieval settlement at Chester and the nearby presence of the Dominican Friary.
- 5.3.7 No further work is therefore considered necessary on the medieval pottery.

Table 1: Quantification of Bulk Finds by Context

Trench	Context	Material	Quantity	Wgt(g)	Period	Comments
1	104	Ceramic	2	13	Medieval	Gritty red ware fragments x 2
1	104	Ceramic	3	28	Post-medieval	Three fragments from a black glazed cup, including a partial handle (possibly 17th century)
1	104	Clay Pipe	2	26	Post-medieval	Undecorated stem fragment x 1 and bowl fragment
1	104	CBM	4	167	Roman to Post-medieval	Brick/tile fragments x 4
1	105	Ceramic	5	70	Medieval	Orange gritty ware with a brown glaze x 1. Partially-reduced buff ware with a green glaze x 1. Partially-reduced greyware x 3, one with a green glaze.
1	105	CBM	20	534	Roman to Post-medieval	Roman box flue tile fragment with keying on exterior surface and sooting on inner surface x 1. Plain tile fragments x 4. Brick fragments x 15
1	U/S	Ceramic	4	91	Medieval	Buff fabric with splashed green glaze x 1. Partially-reduced red ware x 3, one with a misfired glaze.
2	202	Glass	1	4	Post-medieval	Small clear green glass bottle neck possibly from an ink or medicine bottle
2	203	CBM	7	272	Roman to Post-medieval	Roman tile fragments x 2. Brick and tile fragments
2	204	Ceramic	1	4	Roman	Undecorated Roman grey ware body fragment
2	204	CBM	33	2493	Roman to Post-medieval	Course Roman tile fragments x 3. Brick and tile fragments x 30
2	U/S	Ceramic	4	81	Medieval	Buff/orange gritty ware x 2. Partially-reduced greyware with orange/green glaze. Reduced greenware body sherd x 1.
2	U/S	Ceramic	6	151	Post-medieval	Glazed course earthenware fragments x 6
2	U/S	Clay Pipe	3	7	Post-medieval	Undecorated stem fragments x 3
2	U/S	Ceramic	2	19	Modern	Two fragments from a creamware plate
2	U/S	CBM	5	518	Roman to Post-medieval	Roman box flue tile fragment with linear and wave keying on exterior surface and sooting evident on inner surface. Brick and tile fragments x 4
3	304	Ceramic	3	29	Post-medieval	Glazed course earthenware fragments x 2
3	304	Ceramic	1	7	Modern	Fragment from a blue plate
3	304	CBM	4	335	Roman to Post-medieval	Roman tile fragment x 1. Medieval tile fragment with green glaze on one surface x 1. Brick/tile fragments x 2
3	U/S	Ceramic	4	121	Post-medieval	19th century stoneware fragment x 1 and glazed earthenware fragments x 3
3	U/S	Ceramic	5	14	Modern	Creamware teacup and plate fragments
3	U/S	Clay Pipe	3	14	Post-medieval	Undecorated stem fragments x 3
3	U/S	Glass	2	117	Post-medieval	Green glass body sherd and bottle neck from probable drink/beer bottle
Total			124	5115		

5.4 Post-medieval Ceramics

- 5.4.1 A total of 16 sherds of post-medieval ceramics, weighing 329g, were recovered during the evaluation from all three trenches. The sherds were recovered from deposits **(104)** and **(304)** and unstratified deposits. The sherds were of moderate size and in poor to moderate condition.
- 5.4.2 A range of post-medieval fabrics were present, comprising mainly glazed stoneware of 18th-19th century date, but also three sherds of a black glazed stoneware (from a single cup) of possible 17th century date, and some cream stoneware of likely 18th-19th century date.
- 5.4.3 The sherds were mostly from coarse domestic storage jars and bowls, with some finer fabrics present. The post-medieval ceramic material is likely to have been deposited as midden material, accumulating at the site from nearby properties. No further research on this material is warranted.

5.5 Modern Ceramics

- 5.5.1 Eight sherds of modern ceramics, weighing 40g, were recovered during the evaluation. The sherds were mostly recovered from unstratified deposits and a single sherd was recovered from deposit **(304)** in Trench 3. The sherds were generally small and in poor to moderate condition.
- 5.5.2 A relatively limited range of modern fabrics were present, comprising mainly glazed creamware plates and part of a teacup, which are likely to have been deposited from nearby. A single sherd from a blue plate recovered from deposit **(304)** could possibly be intrusive given the confined nature of the excavation. No further research on this material is warranted.

5.6 Glass

- 5.6.1 Three sherds of green bottle glass, weighing 121g, were recovered deposit **(202)** and unstratified deposits in Trench 3 during the evaluation. No maker's marks were present.
- 5.6.2 One sherd was recovered from the deposit **(202)** in Trench 2 was from the neck of a small bottle with a diameter of 25mm, which may have been an ink bottle or possibly a medicine bottle. Another from Trench 3 was evidently a beer or drink bottle due to the glass thickness. The third sherd was a similar body sherd. All the sherds are likely post-medieval date, and probably originated as midden material.
- 5.6.3 No further analysis of this material is warranted.

5.7 Clay Pipe

- 5.7.1 Eight fragments of clay tobacco pipe, weighing 47g, were recovered from all three trenches. The sherds were recovered from unstratified deposits and deposit **(104)** in Trench 1. The sherds were all

stem fragments apart from part of a bowl recovered from deposit **(104)**. No decoration was noted, and no maker's marks were present on any of the sherds.

5.7.2 The stem-hole size was measured to give an idea of the date for these fragments (see Table 2 below) although this should only be considered a rough guide. The stem-hole sizes varied between 1.5mm and 3.0mm indicating a late 17th to 18th century date for the material (Oswald 1975).

5.7.3 Nothing further could be gained from the fragments.

Table 2: Binford's Pipestem Chronology (Kipfer 2008, 8)

<i>Stem-Hole Ø (in/XX)</i>	<i>Conversion (mm)</i> <i>1 inch = 25.4mm</i> <i>1/64 (inch) = 0.4mm</i>	<i>Dates</i>
9/64	9 x 0.4mm = 3.6	1590 – 1620
8/64	8 x 0.4mm = 3.2	1620 – 1650
7/64	7 x 0.4mm = 2.8	1650 – 1680
6/64	6 x 0.4mm = 2.4	1680 – 1720
5/64	5 x 0.4mm = 2	1720 – 1750
4/64	4 x 0.4mm = 1.6	1750 - 1800

5.8 Ceramic Building Material (CBM)

5.8.1 Ceramic building material was the most common type of material recovered during the evaluation. In total 73 fragments, weighing 4,319g, were recovered from the excavated deposits. The vast majority of the fragments were small brick or tile fragments which could not be identified to type, and could potentially be Roman, medieval, post-medieval in date. Obviously modern material was discarded following processing. Only those fragments which are of interest are discussed below.

5.8.2 Three large Roman ceramic tile fragments were recovered from deposit **(204)**, apparently lying on top of a possible wall foundation **(207)**. These comprised probable fragments of Roman flanged *tegulae*, large rectangular tiles with an L-shaped flange on each long side. The largest measured 200mm by 150mm and was 34mm thick. Several smaller fragments were a similar fabric.

5.8.3 A Roman box-flue tile fragment was recovered from an unstratified context in the same trench (Trench 2). This measured 150mm by 110mm and was 21mm thick with linear and wave keyeing on exterior surface and sooting evident on inner surface. Box-flues are hollow box-like tiles which were set into walls to allow hot air from an under-floor hypocaust to heat a room's walls. The tile was keyed with wooden rollers when still damp, so that the tiles could be firmly mortared into place.

5.8.4 A smaller Roman box flue tile fragment with keyeing on the exterior surface and sooting on inner surface was recovered from deposit **(105)** in Trench 1. This measured 58mm by 46mm and was 15mm thick. Numerous CBM fragments were recovered from this deposit which may also be Roman.

- 5.8.5 A further fragment of Roman flanged *tegulae* was recovered from deposit **(304)** in Trench 3. This comprised a small section of an L-shaped flange, measuring 65mm by 54mm by 40mm.
- 5.8.6 A medieval floor tile fragment was recovered from the same deposit **(304)** in Trench 3. This was red in colour and measured 86mm by 83mm and was 32mm thick, being notably darker in colour than the Roman material. The tile had a rounded and indented outer edge with traces of green/brown glaze on part of the upper surface. Most of the upper surface of the tile was missing.
- 5.8.7 The remainder of the material was not dated to period and provided no further information.

5.9 Research potential

- 5.9.1 The discovery of quantities of ceramic building material, including some relatively large Roman tile fragments, adds to the interpretation that there were substantial Roman buildings on or near the site at 26 & 28 Nicholas Street. The Roman tile recovered from deposit **(204)** is likely to relate to demolition deposits. Two fragments of Roman box-flue tile also show evidence for heated rooms.
- 5.9.2 The medieval pottery is of very limited research potential as this was recovered from accumulated soils and is likely to have originated from the nearby medieval settlement at Chester, and the subsequent use of the site as agricultural land and/or gardens. The medieval floor tile could have potentially originated from a building forming part of the Dominican Friary, but this is uncertain as the tile was also recovered from a deep soil deposit at Nicholas Street Mews.
- 5.9.3 The remainder of the assemblage was recovered accumulated soil deposits and does not add any significant information to the site stratigraphy or the history of the site. It is likely that this assemblage has arisen largely from post-medieval midden deposits from the adjacent houses.
- 5.9.4 The Roman and medieval tile will be maintained with the project archive, along with the Roman pottery recovered from deposit **(204)** and post-medieval ceramics. The remaining material will be discarded.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Origins, Development and Use

- 6.1.1 Desk-based research undertaken prior to the trial trench evaluation identified that there is a high potential for archaeological remains within the site dating to the Roman and medieval periods. The western portion of the proposed development area lies within that part of Chester which is known to have been the site of an extensive settlement during the Roman period (*canabae*). The western portion of the site also lay within the precinct of the Dominican Friary in the medieval period; the precinct boundary apparently bisecting the east side of the proposed development area.
- 6.1.2 Previous archaeological works at the site included a trial trench evaluation at No.3 Nicholas Street Mews. This exposed the corner of a basement inside the building which was c.0.60m deep and comprised six courses of dressed, red sandstone masonry. The basement cut into deep soil deposits extending to a depth of c.2m below ground level and overlying the natural clay. These soil deposits were dated by finds to the early post-medieval period (16th/17th century) and were thought to be agricultural or garden soils that accumulated following the dissolution of the Dominican Friary.
- 6.1.3 An archaeological excavation on the west side of Nicholas Street Mews, immediately to the north of the proposed development area revealed a complex series of Roman deposits in 1988. The earliest evidence of Roman activity comprised a sandstone rubble surface at the northern end of the trench resting on the natural deposits dating to the late first to early second century. Fragmentary remains of a timber structure of possible second century date were also found, and a Roman stone wall and substantial surface were also revealed dating to the first half of the second century. Roman remains were encountered at a depth of c.1.6m (Ward 2012).
- 6.1.4 The current project has identified a similar sandstone surface in the carpark at Nicholas Street Mews (in Trench 3) which was also 1.6m below ground level (15.54m aOD). The surface was overlaid by a 0.8m deep deposit of post-medieval soil which had accumulated at the site. This soil was subsequently cut by the sandstone foundation for the brick wall of an early 19th century building.
- 6.1.5 Potential Roman remains have also been revealed to the rear of the properties at Nicholas Street comprising similar red sandstone cobble surfaces and a possible wall foundation from which fragments of Roman tile were recovered. The archaeological deposits were encountered at a depth of 1.05m to 1.7m below ground level (17.17m aOD in Trench 2 and 16.46m aOD in Trench 1). Natural deposits were not encountered in the trenches, but this is believed to be present at around 2m blg.
- 6.1.6 The presence of ceramic building material, including some large Roman tile fragments, suggests that there were substantial Roman buildings on or near the site, with evidence for heated rooms identified in the form of box-flue tile fragments.

6.2 Impact Assessment

- 6.2.1 The archaeological evaluation has been successful in determining the presence and depth of archaeological deposits within the proposed development area, which adds to the information provided by the previous archaeological evaluation undertaken in 2018 at No3 Nicholas Street Mews.
- 6.2.2 The current proposal is to re-develop the site to create an aparthotel, which will include alterations to the existing Grade II listed townhouses on Nicholas Street, redevelopment and extension of the 20th century wings to the rear of No.26 and No.28 Nicholas Street, redevelopment of the Grade II listed No.3 Nicholas Street Mews and associated outbuildings, and construction of a three-storey residential building on the former carpark to the west of Nicholas Street Mews.
- 6.2.3 Based on the foundation design provided, the excavation of foundations for the new extension to the southern 20th century extension on the south side of the site will impact an area of 95m². This will comprise construction of a concrete ground beam requiring the excavation of foundations measuring 0.6m wide and 0.45m deep. This will require excavation to a depth of 0.6m blg which will not, impact the archaeological deposits identified in Trench 1 and Trench 2. In total 12 concrete piles measuring 0.2m in diameter will be utilised which will reach the level of the identified archaeology. This will impact an area of 0.38m² which amounts to 4% of the area of the proposed extension area.
- 6.2.4 Excavation will be undertaken within the yard to the rear of No.3 Nicholas Street Mews for construction of an extension covering 14m². This will require a strip foundation measuring 0.6m wide and 0.2m deep, involving the excavation of a foundation trench to 0.75m blg. No features of archaeological significance were identified in this area in the trenches excavated during the previous evaluation at No.3 Nicholas Street Mews (Earthwork Archaeological Services 2018). The depth of the proposed excavation work is not expected to impact significant archaeological deposits in this area. No new foundations will be required to reconfigure No.3 Nicholas Street Mews and its outbuildings.
- 6.2.5 It is understood that the excavation of foundations for the new buildings in the location of the former garage and car park on Nicholas Street Mews will involve similar strip foundations, involving the excavation of foundation trenches to 0.75m blg. Given the depth of the identified archaeological deposits at 1.6m blg in Trench 3, this is not expected to impact important archaeological remains.
- 6.2.6 Overall, the depths of excavation required for the foundations at Nicholas Street and Nicholas Street Mews is not expected to impact on significant archaeological deposits, apart from the concrete piles which will impact 4% of the total area of the proposed extension.
- 6.2.7 The nature and scope of any further stage of archaeological recording at the site (if required) will be determined in consultation with Mark Leah, Development Management Archaeologist and Team Leader at Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service.

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APPENDIX 1: Figures






 <p>Eden Heritage Ltd 2021</p>	<p>PROJECT: 26 and 28 Nicholas Street, Chester Cheshire</p> <p>CLIENT: PWA Planning</p> <p>REPORT: EH109/03</p> <p>SCALE: 1:20,000 at A4</p> <p>DRAWN BY: MDR</p> <p>DATE: May 2021</p>	<p>KEY:</p> <p> site location</p>	 <p>Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2018)</p>
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Figure 1: Site Location.

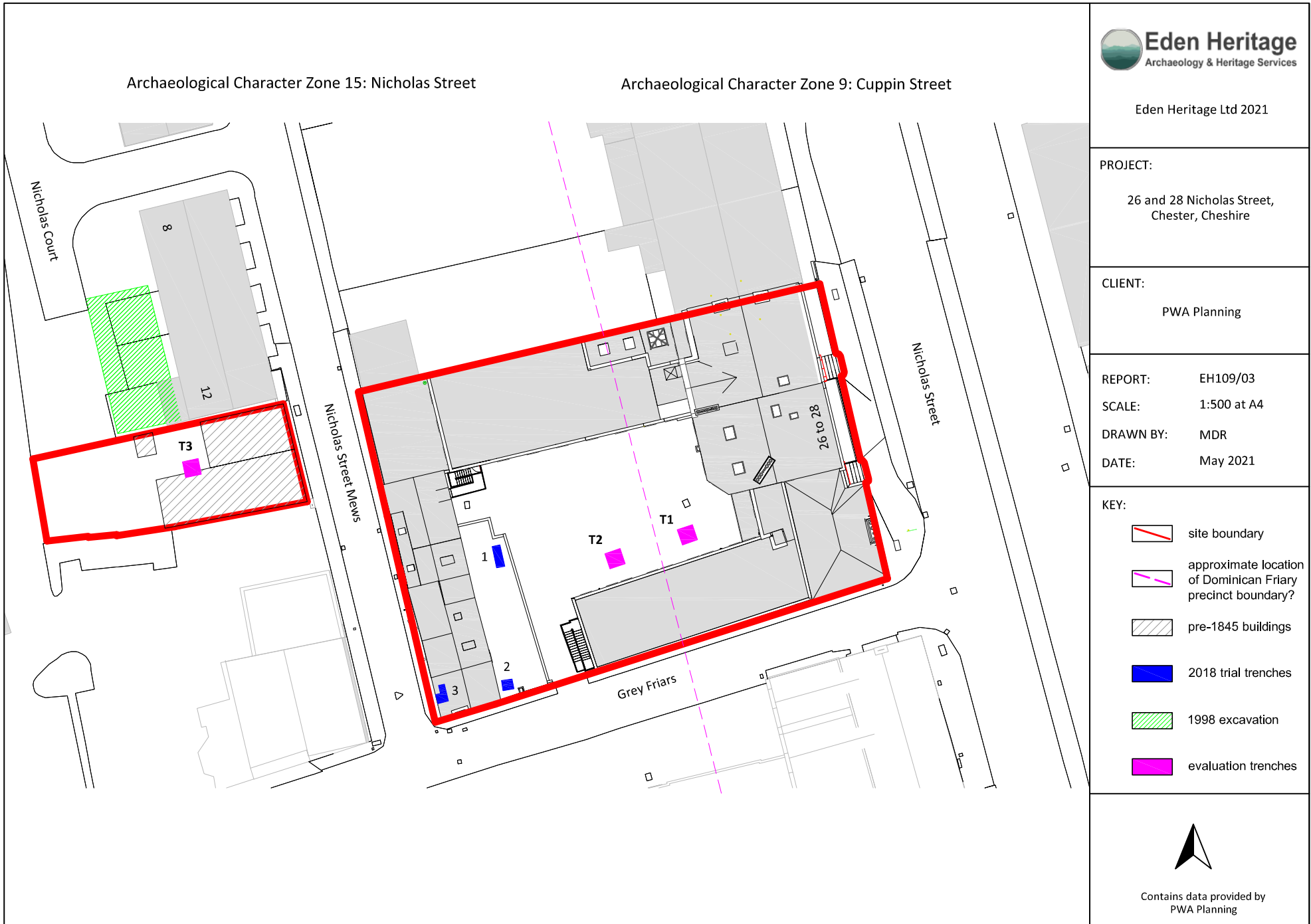
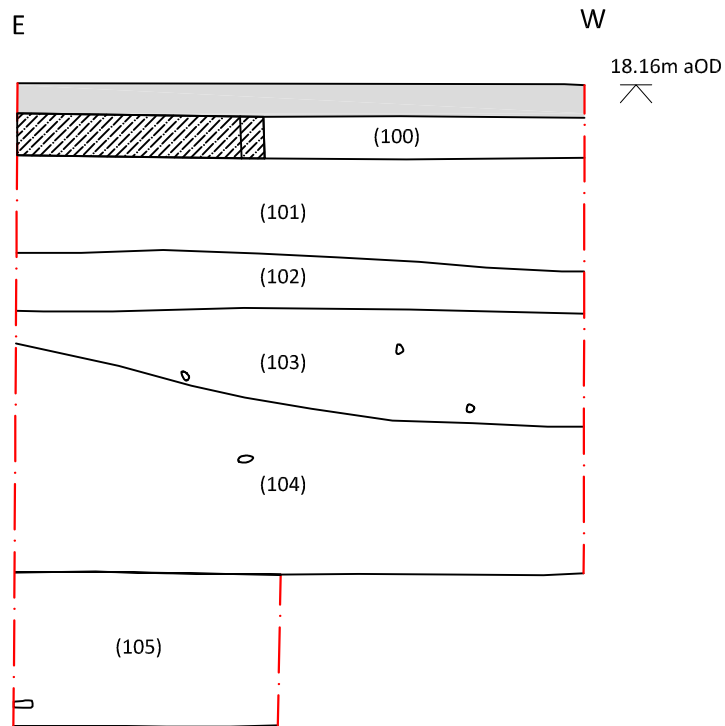
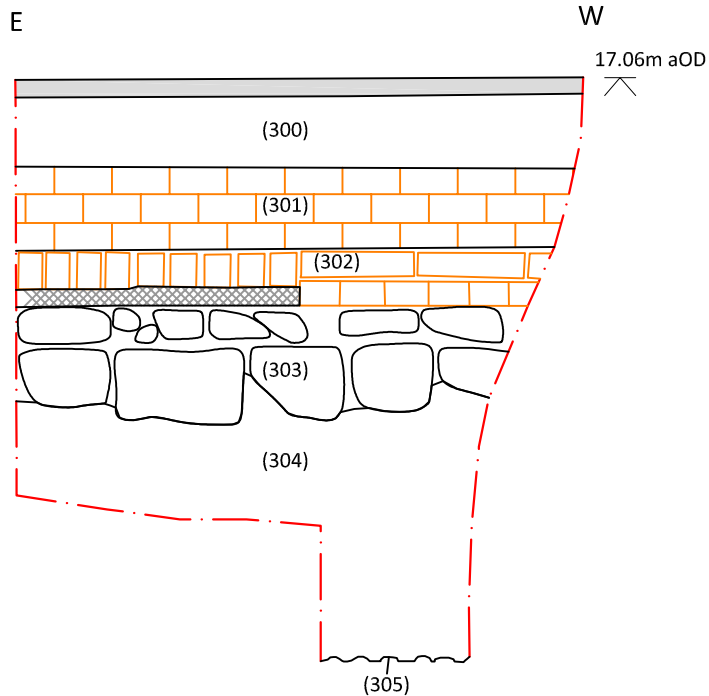


Figure 2: Proposed development area showing locations of evaluation trenches (T1- T3).



North-facing section of Trench 1



North-facing section of Trench 3

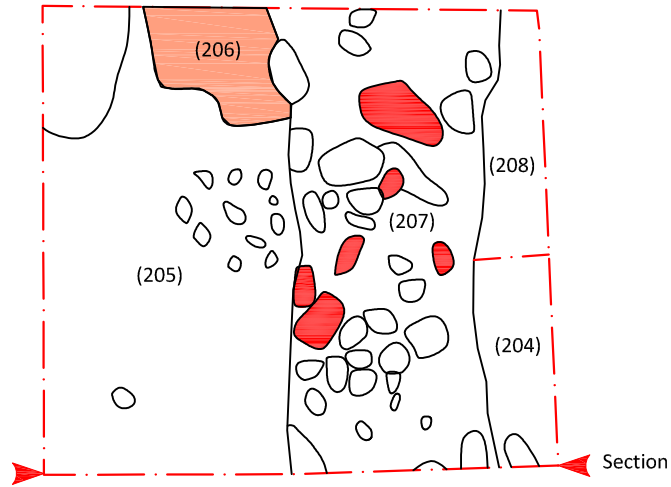


Eden Heritage Ltd 2021

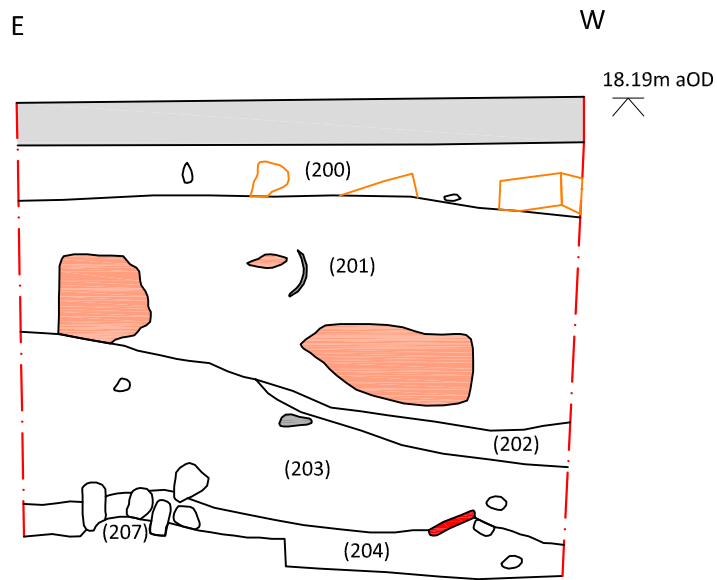
PROJECT: 26 and 28 Nicholas Street, Chester Cheshire
 CLIENT: PWA Planning
 REPORT: EH109/03
 SCALE: 1:20 at A4
 DRAWN BY: MDR
 DATE: May 2021

KEY:	
limit of archaeological excavation	carpark surface
context number	concrete
section location	brick
reference level	mortar

Figure 3: Sections of T1 and T3.



Plan of Trench 2



North-facing section of Trench 2



Eden Heritage Ltd 2021

PROJECT: 26 and 28 Nicholas Street, Chester Cheshire
 CLIENT: PWA Planning
 REPORT: EH109/03
 SCALE: 1:20 at A4
 DRAWN BY: MDR
 DATE: May 2021

KEY:			
	limit of archaeological excavation		carpark surface
	context number		concrete
	section location		brick
	reference level		clay
	oyster shell		CBM

Figure 4: Plan and section of T2.

**Heritage Impact Assessment
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment
Historic Landscape Survey
Written Scheme of Investigation**

**Geophysical Survey
Trial Trench Evaluation
Archaeological Excavation
Archaeological Watching Briefs**

