

Archaeological Desk Based Assessment

DEE HOUSE CHESTER

For Chester Renaissance, Cheshire West and Chester Council

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Archaeological Desk Based Assessment

DEE HOUSE CHESTER

Client: Chester Renaissance, Cheshire West and Chester Council

Local Authority: Cheshire West and Chester Council

NGR: SJ 4081 6611

Planning App: Pre-application

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Abstract

The site located at Dee House, Chester, CH1 1SN is being considered in order to explore options for bringing it back in to beneficial use for redevelopment. This report contains the results of cartographic, archaeological, and documentary research into the site undertaken by L – P : Archaeology on behalf of Chester Renaissance (CwaC).

The site lies within the Chester Area of Archaeological Importance, designated under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 and the Chester City Conservation Area, designated in 1969 by Chester City Council. The site overlies part of a Scheduled Monument, known as Roman Amphitheatre (National Ref no:1004638), which is also Grade I listed as Remains of Roman Amphitheatre (List entry no:1375863). The site also contains the Grade II Listed Building known as Dee House.

The site is of international archaeological significance owing to it containing the buried remains of Chester's Roman Amphitheatre. This report has focused on the results of previous archaeological investigations to determine the depth at which significant archaeological remains survive across the site; this information has been illustrated within the report by a number of cross-sections and plans. The criteria for what is considered to be significant archaeology has been clarified and agreed with English Heritage during the course of the desk based work. Areas within the site where robust archaeological data is lacking and which to some extent remain an unknown quantity have also been identified.

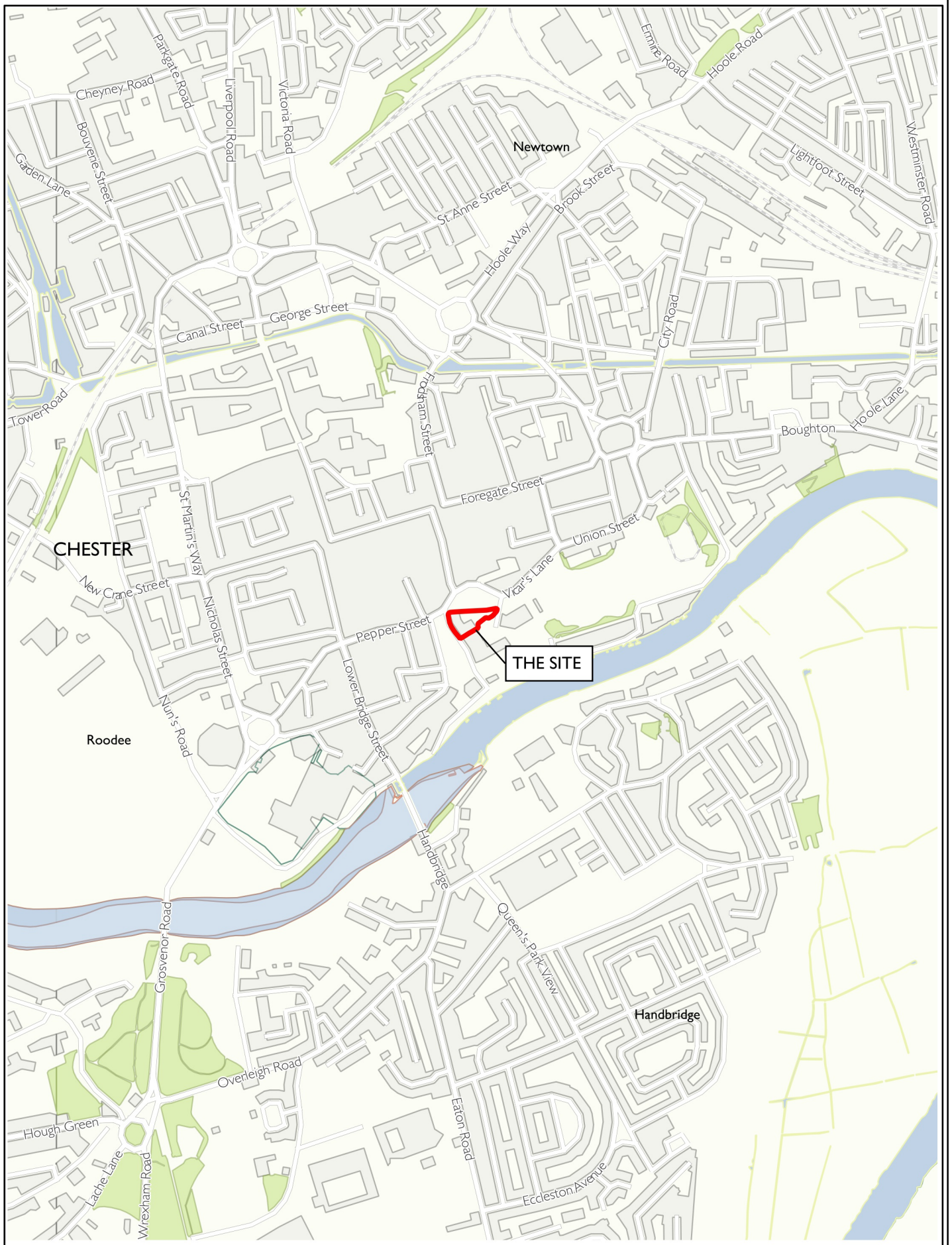
The report has set out the significance of the site in archaeological and historical terms and has used this information to assess the setting of the various heritage assets both within and adjacent to it. This assessment is considered in relation to the implications of future non-specific development on the site as formal proposals are still awaited from potential developers.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document has been prepared by Dan Garner of L - P : Archaeology on behalf of Chester Renaissance (CWaC). It sets out the results of an Archaeological Desk Based Assessment at Dee House, Chester, CH1 1SN. The NGR is SJ 4081 6611 (Figures 1 and 2).
- 1.2. The local planning authority is Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaC) who take advice from the Archaeology Planning Advisory Service (APAS).
- 1.3. This document has been prepared in response to a request from the Local Planning Authority, as advised by English Heritage in a letter dated 04/01/2010 (Appendix 2), for further information in order to explore options for bringing Dee House and environs (FIGURE 1) in Chester back into beneficial use.
- 1.4. This document is based on a brief for the preparation of an Archaeological Desk Based Assessment provided by APAS (APPENDIX A).
- 1.5. The report was produced by Dan Garner BA FSA MCifA (the former Chester City Council co-director of the Amphitheatre Project) of L – P : Archaeology; with input from Tony Wilmott BA MA FSA MCifA of English Heritage (co-director of the Amphitheatre Project) and with support from Blair Poole MSc MCifA of L – P : Archaeology. All work was undertaken to comply with Institute for Archaeologists' Code of Conduct (INSTITUTE FOR ARCHAEOLOGISTS 2013B) and the Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology (INSTITUTE FOR ARCHAEOLOGISTS 2013A).
- 1.6. The site lies within the Chester Area of Archaeological Importance, designated under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 and the Chester City Conservation Area, designated in 1969 by Chester City Council. The site overlies part of a Scheduled Monument, known as Roman Amphitheatre (National Ref no:1004638), which is also Grade I listed as Remains of Roman Amphitheatre (List entry no:1375863). The site also contains the Grade II Listed Building known as Dee House (Figure 3).
- 1.7. It should be noted that for the purposes of this report reference to Dee House and the Chester amphitheatre are synonymous as the site is made up of both of these

heritage assets. Reference in Sections 5, 6 and 7 to the amphitheatre site are thus by virtue referring to Dee House and its environs.

FIGURE I // Site Location General



0 500 m



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

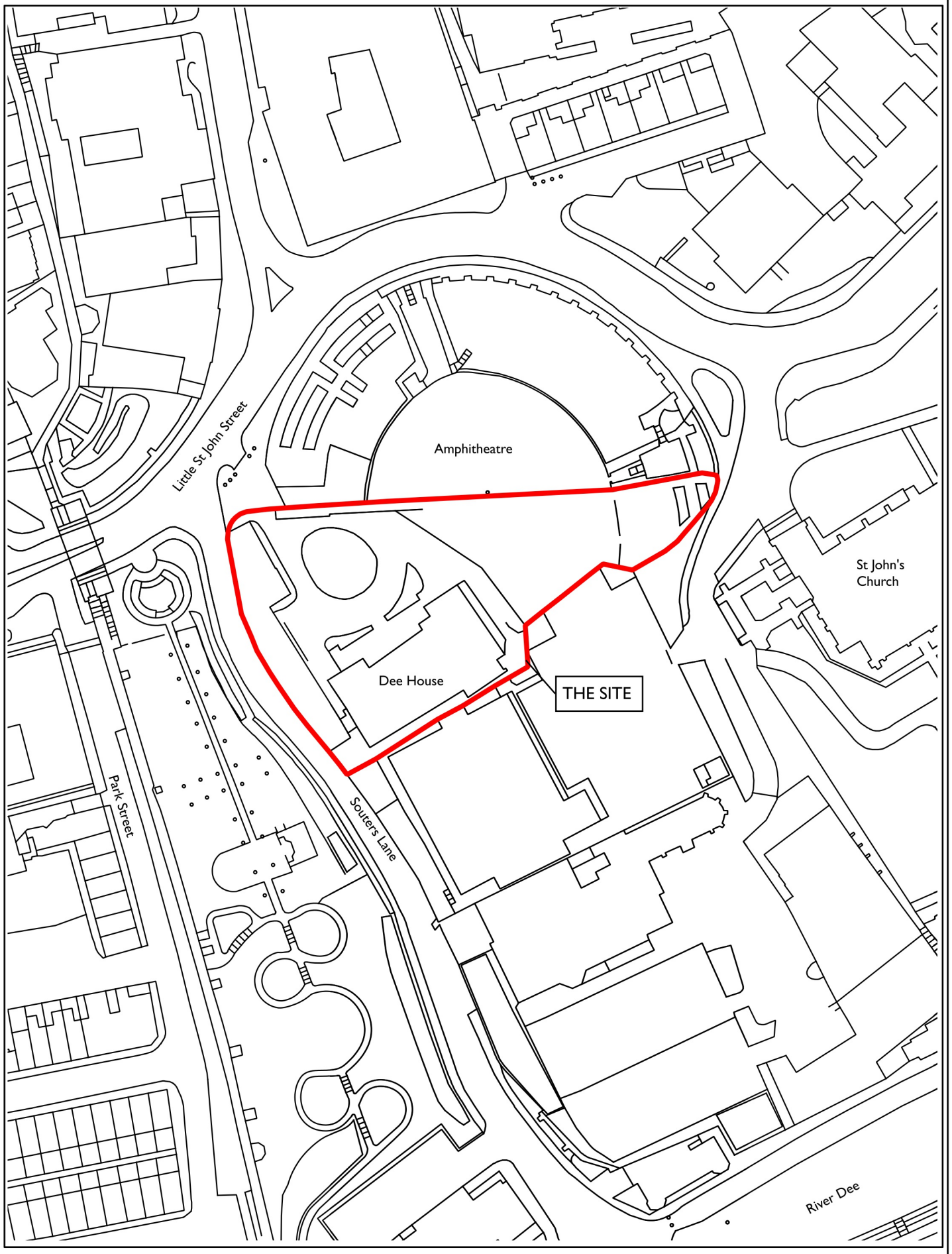
DESCRIPTION // Site Location General

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FIGURE 2 // Site Location Detail



0 50 m



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

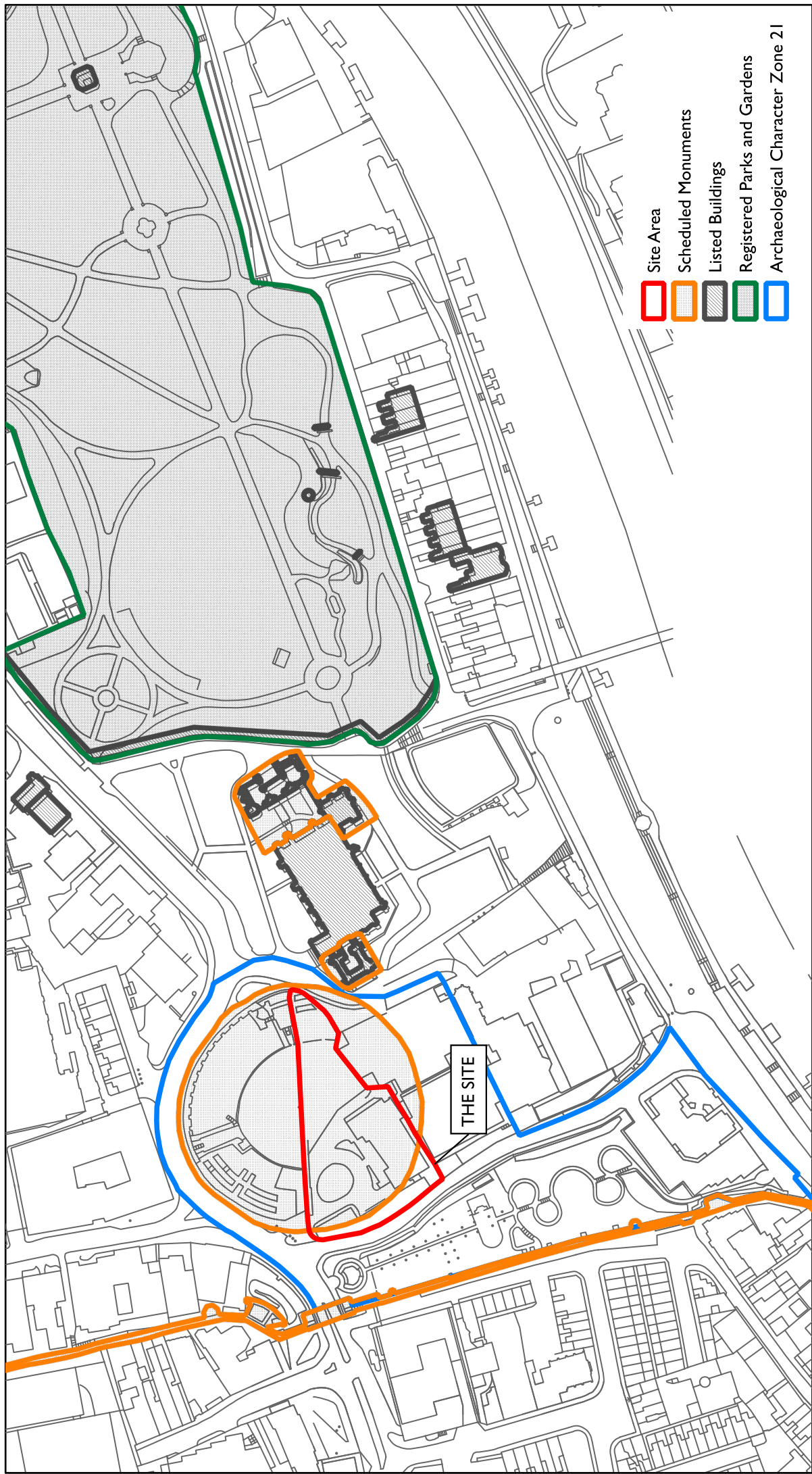
DESCRIPTION // Site Location Detail

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FIGURE 3 // Designations



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Designations

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2. Planning Background

- 2.1. In March 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government issued the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (DCLG 2012). Section 12 of this document sets out planning policies on the conservation of the historic environment.
- 2.2. Additional guidance to help implement these policies is given in the retained Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide (DCLG, EH, DCMS 2010).
- 2.3. On matters concerning archaeology and the historic environment the Cheshire West and Chester Council take impartial advice from the Archaeology Planning Advisory Service.
- 2.4. The site lies within the Chester Area of Archaeological Importance, designated under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. This places certain procedural constraints primarily relating to below-ground disturbance operations. These are normally dealt with through the planning process, but any significant ground disturbance which is carried out under Permitted Development Rights requires six weeks' notice to Cheshire West and Chester, through the completion of an Operations Notice.
- 2.5. The site lies within the Chester Conservation Area as designated by the local planning authority. Conservation Area Consent will be required for proposals that will impact the character of the area as defined in the council local plan/UDP (as referenced above).
- 2.6. The site area contains a Grade II listed building as designated by English Heritage. Any material impact upon the listed building by development on the site will require Listed Building Consent.
- 2.7. The site area contains a scheduled monument as designated by English Heritage. Any material impact upon the scheduled monument by development on the site will require Scheduled Monument Consent.
- 2.8. The site lies within the Zone of Primary Archaeological Character (considered to have the highest potential for significant heritage assets and the highest sensitivity to change) in the Chester Archaeological Plan. At a more detailed level it lies within

Character Zone 21 (Amphitheatre and Souter's Lane) of the Chester Archaeological Characterisation. Both the Archaeological Plan and the Archaeological Characterisation are part of the Chester Urban Archaeological Database Project, which was funded by English Heritage. The Plan was produced in 2013 and was endorsed by the Cheshire West and Chester Local Development Framework Panel as a key Evidence Base Document supporting the preparation of the Local Plan.

2.9. This report has been produced to inform any future proposals for the development of the site, by assessing the significance of the archaeological remains in the light of the latest research, defining the depth at which important deposits occur, and identifying any areas where robust information on the nature of the strata is lacking. In view of the statutory designations of Dee House and land which it occupies, English Heritage has advised that 'a clear statement of the significance of archaeological, historical, and architectural features should be prepared' in order to inform future proposals. English Heritage has particularly stressed that the assessment should take note of the outcomes of the most recent investigations on the site of the amphitheatre between 2004 and 2005 (See Appendix 2).

3. Aims of the Assessment

3.1. It is not the aim of this assessment to present a complete history of Chester, nor is it the intention of this report to examine every artefact found in the local area. Rather, the aim of this assessment is to review the available data, characterise the archaeology and construct a model of the potential archaeology within the study site.

3.2. The assessment seeks to address the following issues:

- ◆ To assess the potential for archaeology.
- ◆ To assess the significance of potential archaeology.
- ◆ To assess the condition of potential archaeology
- ◆ To assess the impact of any future proposed development on the potential archaeology.

3.3. The assessment considers the physical impact of development as well as issues of setting with reference to Dee House and environs, the excavated section of the amphitheatre and neighbouring heritage assets such as St John's Church and the City Walls.

4. Methodology

4.1. This report has been researched and written to conform to L – P : Archaeology's Standards and Guidance for Desk Based Assessment. These standards in turn comply with the Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide (DCLG, EH, DCMS 2010) and Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Desk Based Assessment (INSTITUTE FOR ARCHAEOLOGISTS 2008).

4.2. The Desk Based Assessment has assessed the whole of the development area and considered the potential for historic assets immediately outside this area. The resulting report provides information which is sufficiently detailed to protect historic environment interests and allow for informed decisions to be made in the on-going planning processes. This work has consisted of the following three stages:

4.3. SEARCHES (STAGE 1)

4.3.1. All available material was consulted including the relevant material contained in the Cheshire Historic Environment Record, which includes the Chester Urban Archaeological Database, held by the Archaeology Planning Advisory Service (APAS).

4.3.2. Additionally, unpublished material held by the Historic Environment Team at their Castle Street offices relating to the primary archive of the 2004-6 amphitheatre excavations was consulted.

4.3.3. A detailed review was conducted of the trial trenching report produced by Lancaster University in 1993 in order to better understand these results in relation to the 2004-6 excavations.

4.4. SITE VISIT (STAGE 2)

4.4.1. A site inspection was carried out as part of the assessment in order to examine the current land use and topography. Access was arranged through Chester Renaissance. The interior of Dee House could not be accessed owing to Health and Safety concerns.

4.4.2. A digital photographic record was made to represent views from inside the site looking out and outside the site looking in. In particular, view points were

considered from the City Walls, St John Street and St John's Church (see plates).

4.4.3. In order to assist with the creation of schematic cross-sections relating to the known archaeological resource a level survey was undertaken across the site to provide accurate data relating to existing ground levels. In particular, the areas recently remodelled for interpretation purposes were surveyed.

4.5.REPORTING (STAGE 3)

4.5.1. The report includes the following with regard to the proposed development area as defined in the Brief (APPENDIX A):

4.5.2. A description with illustrations of Dee House, the amphitheatre and their immediate environs including the extent of the statutorily-designated areas.

4.5.3. A summary of past archaeological work.

4.5.4. A description with accompanying illustrations setting out the known levels and nature of archaeological remains of all periods within the proposed development area. Levels will be expressed in terms of height above Ordnance Datum.

4.5.5. An assessment of the significance of the archaeological remains in relation to current national guidance from English Heritage and the Department of Culture Media and Sport. This will include consultation with Tony Wilmott of English Heritage (co-director of the Chester Amphitheatre Project).

4.5.6. Five cross sections were constructed through the site to provide information relating to the depths of known archaeology and how it related to current ground levels. These sections are intended to be a means of demonstrating the scope for alterations within the site. It was agreed after discussions with Tony Wilmott of English Heritage that 'significant archaeology' archaeology on the site refers to 18th century and earlier deposits; whilst 19th and 20th century archaeology can be classed as modern. The cross sections were chosen to illustrate the following:

- ◆ A-AA to illustrate the relative heights for the various displayed elements of

the Roman Amphitheatre including the arena floor;

- ◆ AA-AB to illustrate the anticipated depths of both significant archaeology and the top of Roman archaeology based on excavation results from 2004-05;
- ◆ A-BB to illustrate the anticipated depths of both significant archaeology and the top of Roman archaeology based on excavation results from 1932, 1993 and 2004-06. Furthermore, to highlight the area of the Dee House forecourt where robust archaeological data is currently lacking;
- ◆ B-BB to illustrate the anticipated depths of both significant archaeology and the top of Roman archaeology based on excavation results from 1993;
- ◆ C-CC to illustrate the anticipated depths of both significant archaeology and the top of Roman archaeology based on excavation results from 1993, 1994 and 2004-05.

4.5.7. An assessment of the potential impact on the setting of designated heritage assets both within and adjacent to the proposed development site.

4.5.8. A statement regarding any areas within the proposed development site where robust data on the nature of below ground archaeological remains is lacking.

4.5.9. A range of plans and sections will be used to illustrate the report. This will include site plans geo-referenced in GIS.

4.5.10. The description of the nature and the assessment of the significance of the archaeological resource will be presented in a similar format to the Character Zone descriptions contained within the Chester Urban Archaeological Database Project.

4.5.11. The archive will be deposited in the appropriate repository not later than six months after completion of the work, allowing for client confidentiality.

5. Site Context

5.1. GEOLOGY

- 5.1.1. The city of Chester occupies a ridge of the Permo-Triassic sandstone known as the Chester Pebble Beds, which protrudes through thick glacial drift deposits (Hebblethwaite 1987, 4; Mason 1976).
- 5.1.2. The Pebble Bed formation comprises medium- to coarse-grained reddish brown sandstone, incorporating characteristic rounded pebbles. In its well-cemented form it is durable enough to have been used as building stone (Earp and Taylor 1986, 16-18, 86). Stone quarries in the Dee gorge below the amphitheatre were worked in the medieval period, but were also worked to obtain stone for Roman construction (Strahan 1882, 3-9). This is the likely source for all stone used in the construction of the amphitheatre and later structures in the vicinity.
- 5.1.3. Roman Chester was sited at the highest navigable point of the river Dee, which was also its lowest fordable crossing point. The Roman bridge from Chester to Handbridge joined the two outcrops of the Pebble Beds through which the river cut.

5.2. TOPOGRAPHY

- 5.2.1. The site of Dee House and the Roman Amphitheatre lies within Chester city centre in a block of land which is designated by the Chester Urban Archaeological Database (UAD) as Zone 21. This is separated to the north from Chester's main shopping zone on Foregate/Eastgate Street by the inner ring-road (Little St John Street) which runs on a sinuous route from Grosvenor Park on the east through the city walls via the Newgate on the west.
- 5.2.2. The site sits on the edge of a terrace on the north side of a natural gorge worn in to the sandstone rock by the course of the River Dee. Below this terrace lies the modern river bank which has been modified in to a leafy promenade since the 18th century.
- 5.2.3. The northern boundary of the site is marked by a pedestrian walkway running between St John's Church in the east and the gates of the Dee House forecourt

in the west. This walkway is a legacy of the Chester Amphitheatre Project and is set on top of the concrete retaining wall demarcating the southern limit of the excavated/displayed part of the Roman Amphitheatre arena.

- 5.2.4. The western boundary to the site is defined by a thoroughfare known as Souter's Lane which follows a steep ravine down to the riverside. To the south the site boundary is the property division between the back of the Dee House complex and the modern court building known as Trident House. Whilst to the east the site boundary tapers to a triangular shaped end at the corner opposite St John's Church.
- 5.2.5. Views to the northwest take in the a section of the City Walls which includes the foundations of the south-east angle tower to the Roman legionary fortress and the medieval gate known as the Wolfeld Gate. Whilst to the immediate north lies the excavated and displayed northern half of the Roman Amphitheatre. Beyond this is a late 20th century building which was built for the BT telephone exchange and has more recently been converted in to a Travel Lodge hotel. To the northeast lies Lumley Place and the former St John's school which until recently served as the Chester Visitor Centre and is currently vacant. The eastern view is mainly taken up by St John's Church and its associated graveyard (now a grassed area containing picnic benches and the occasional mature tree); across which can be seen the western limits of Grosvenor Park.
- 5.2.6. Within the site itself much of the southern half is occupied by the Grade II listed 18th century building known as Dee House with its accompanying chapel wing and later 19th century extension. Whilst the western side of the site is occupied by a range of buildings which originally functioned as ancillary buildings prior to the use of the site as a convent school.
- 5.2.7. The rest of the site is a fairly open forecourt dominated by a large raised circular flower bed which acts as a central roundabout imitating the original carriage-turning circle for Dee House. This raised bed has a low maintenance formal planting scheme largely consisting of box plants but is dominated by a concrete electric lamp-post at its centre. The raised bed is surrounded by hard

standing in the form of modern tarmacadam. There are a couple of mature trees (including a tree of heaven) in the opposing southern corners of the forecourt.

5.2.8. The open forecourt is currently serving as an informal contractors car park and builders yard for the storage of building materials associated with maintenance and repair work in other parts of the city.

5.2.9. The eastern part of the site is now separated from the Dee House compound by a steel mesh fence and forms part of the recently re-vamped site interpretation associated with the Roman Amphitheatre. It is used as a public amenity space with benches and a rectangular stone dais displaying a bronze model of the reconstructed Roman Amphitheatre.

6. Summary of Archaeological Investigations

6.1. A more detailed account of previous archaeological work undertaken on the site is provided in Appendix 2. This section is intended to provide a summary of the archaeological investigations undertaken to present and is presented in a chronological order in Table 1. Early sections refer to the site of the Roman Amphitheatre rather than to Dee House; however, it should be noted that Dee House and the Roman Amphitheatre are synonymous in this report as the site is made up of both of these heritage assets. Refer to figure 5 for the location of archaeological investigations described in this section.

6.2. The cross sections referred to in section 4.5.6 (above) and plans showing the level of significant archaeology across the site were generated using the archaeological data recovered from the archaeological investigations summarised in Table 1.

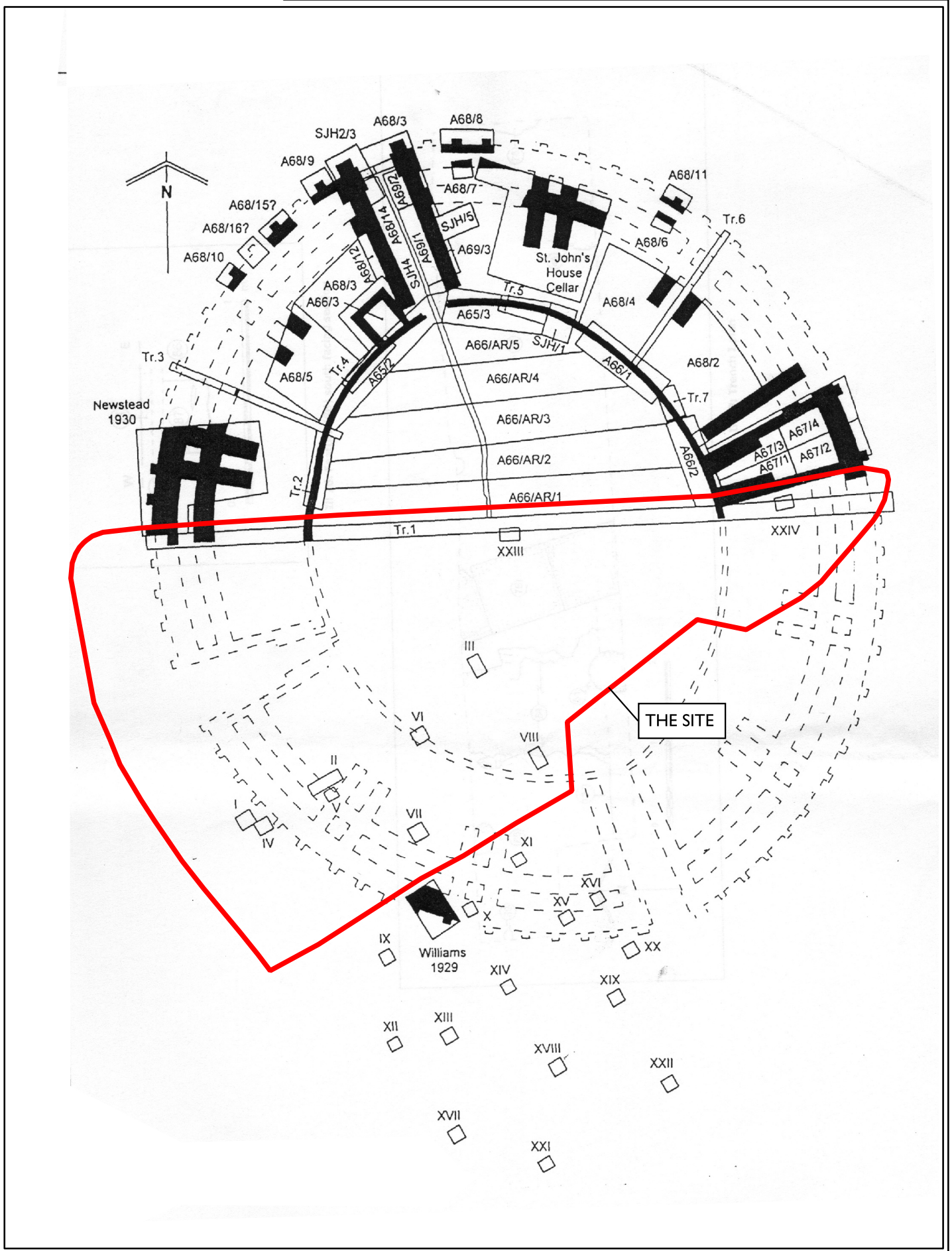
Date	Summary of Investigations
1738	A slate plaque depicting a Roman gladiator was discovered in Fleshmonger's Lane, now Newgate Street.
1929	The Amphitheatre building itself was discovered during the excavation of a heating chamber for a rear extension to the Dee House Ursuline convent school.
1930-31	Professors R Newstead and J P Droop directed excavations that established the extent of the building and gave some idea of its plan and state of survival (Newstead and Droop 1932a). The main east entrance and one of the <i>vomitoria</i> were exposed and partially excavated.
1934	Further trial excavation was carried out by R Newstead at 19, St John's Street and in St John's House to determine the northern limits of the amphitheatre (JCAS 1936, 124).
1939	Three air raid shelters were dug on the site. The excavation of these shelters resulted in the destruction of a 'considerable portion of the northern flanking wall of the western entrance to the amphitheatre' (JCAS 1940, 164). This was the <i>vomitium</i> which had been excavated by Newstead and Droop in 1930-31.
1957	A series of trial holes were excavated to establish the line of the outermost amphitheatre wall in order to fix the line of the new Little St John's Street (Thompson 1996, 50).
1958	St John's House was demolished as part of the general clearance of buildings that occupied the northern half of the amphitheatre (Thompson 1975, 131)
1960	Excavation of the cellar of St John's House and the formal excavation of the <i>cavea</i> or seating bank beneath the floor of this building. The work revealed the existence of timber beam-slots, and this was the first indication of what Thompson interpreted as a timber precursor to the stone-built amphitheatre. At the same time the excavation of the main north entrance of the amphitheatre, which lay

	adjacent to St John's House, was undertaken. In order allow the excavation of the arena it was necessary to construct a substantial and deep concrete retaining wall in order to retain the archaeology of the southern half of the amphitheatre.
1961	Trenching revealed the top of the arena wall (Thompson 1975, 132), and the mechanical removal of 'overburden' began.
1965-66	The face of the arena wall was exposed in a series of trenches cut through the arena fill along the curve of the wall. Where the arena wall was leaning it was jacked back to the horizontal. To hold it in position the trench to the rear of the arena wall was filled with concrete.
1967	The arena was largely excavated by the use of earthmoving machinery. This removed in excess of 3.5m depth of archaeological deposits dating from the end of the Roman period to the present. The lower levels of the arena fill were excavated by hand.
1968	Earthmoving machinery was again used, this time on the north-west seating bank, with the aim of exposing more of the timber 'grillage'.
1970-72	The monument was further consolidated and opened as a public monument. The portions displayed were the deep areas of the arena and the east and west principal entrances.
1976	The Dee House convent school was closed, and the buildings were acquired by Post Office Telephones (later British Telecom) and converted for use as a telephone exchange.
1990	Consent was given for a scheme, including the demolition of Dee House, but the scheme failed due to financial problems, and planning consent lapsed in October 1995.
1993	Archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the University of Lancaster Archaeological Unit (Buxton 1993; Fig 24, 1-40). Forty trenches were recorded across the southern part of the site. The work showed that beneath the core of Dee House cellarage had destroyed virtually all of the archaeology while under the later accretions to the building preservation was somewhat better.
1994	Chester Archaeology undertook a second phase of evaluation with six additional trenches (Cleary 1994; Fig 24, 41-46).
1995	Dee House and its immediate surroundings were purchased by Chester City Council while the 1930s buildings and associated land to the rear of Dee House was acquired by property developer David Maclean.
1999-2001	Construction of Trident House, which now houses the Civil Justice Centre. It was designed to cause minimal damage to the buried remains through the reuse of existing pile foundations, and an archaeological watching brief was maintained on the construction work by Gifford and Partners (Garner 2005; Fig 24, 47-48).
2000	Chester Archaeology undertook an evaluation of the conserved area of the amphitheatre. Nine small trenches were excavated to establish whether any archaeological deposits survived on the exposed part of the site, and if so whether buried deposits or structures were deteriorating as a result of visitor activity (Matthews et al 2001). This work clearly showed that the northern side of the monument had not been as totally excavated as had been believed.

2001-03	Further work was undertaken principally on the northern half of the amphitheatre. Surviving Roman stratigraphy in the east entrance and on the seating banks was also examined and recorded (Matthews et al 2002, Matthews 2003).
2004	The Chester Amphitheatre Project non-invasive surveys. The work included large scale topographic and analytical landscape survey, ground-based photogrammetric survey and laser scanning, architectural survey encompassing all historic buildings in the area ground-based and aerial photographic surveys were also conducted.
2004-06	The Chester Amphitheatre Project excavation of Areas A, B and C.
2007 on	Post excavation assessment, analysis and publication.

Table 1- Summary of archaeological investigations on the site

FIGURE 4 // Excavations 1930s to 1990s



0 10 m



PROJECT // I827C - Dee House

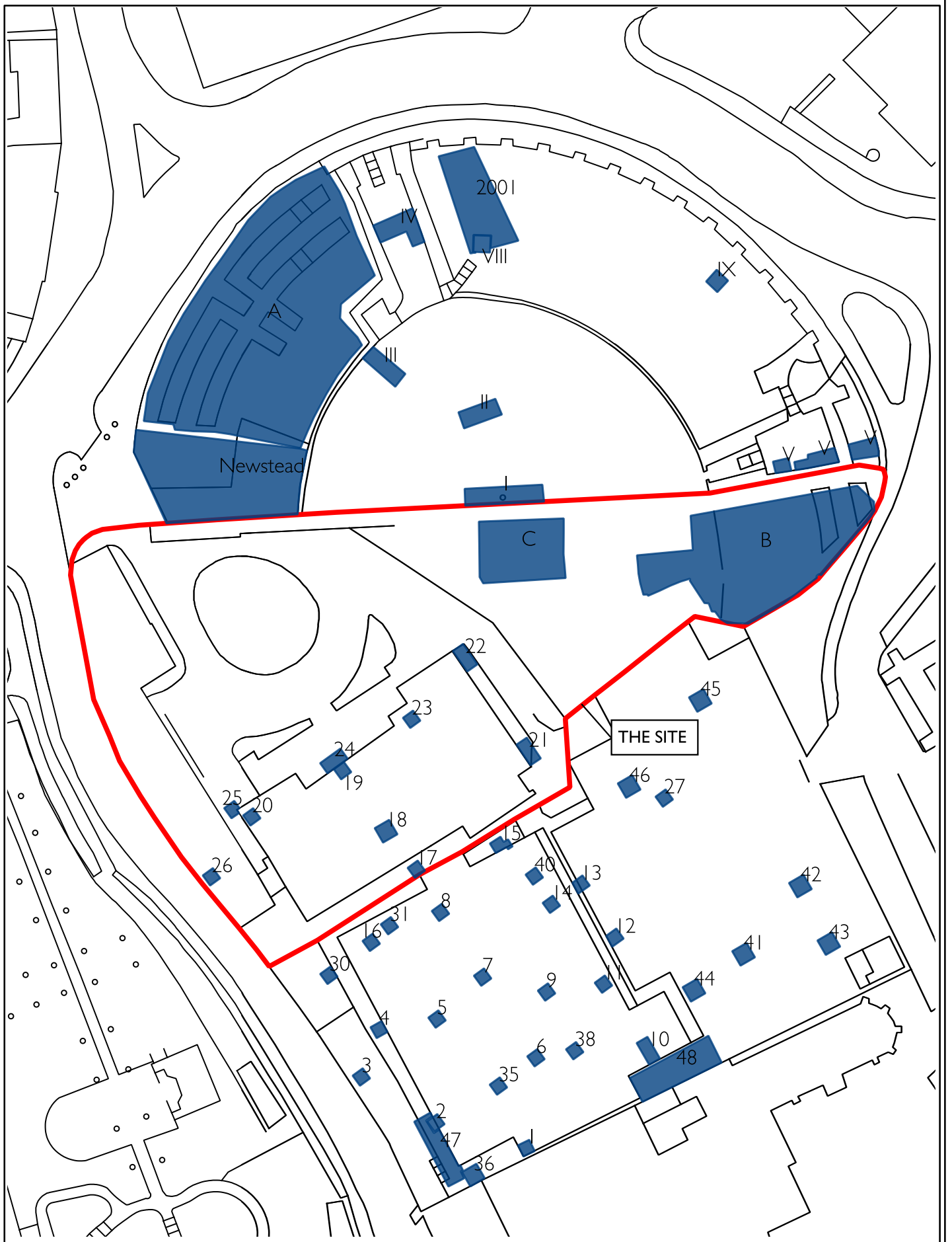
DESCRIPTION // Extent of Excavations 1930s to 1990s

After Matthews, 2001

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L-P:ARCHAEOLOGY

FIGURE 5 // Excavations 1993 to 2006



0 10 m



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Previous Excavations 1993 to 2006

7. Summary of Archaeological and Historical Background

7.1. This section provides a chronological summary of the archaeological phases so far identified within the environs of Dee House and the Roman amphitheatre and is presented in a chronological order in Table 2. These phases have been broken down into a series of Themes for more easy reference in later sections of the report. A more detailed account of the archaeological and historical background to the site is provided in Appendix 3.

7.2. The locations of previous archaeological investigations are shown in Figure 5. Data regarding the levels at which Roman and significant later archaeology are known to survive on the site are displayed as a series of plans and cross-sections in figures 6 to 16.

Theme	Period	Summary
1	Mesolithic	A total of 161 worked stone artefacts. Mainly recovered from early cultivation soils dating to the later Iron Age which had been preserved beneath the Roman Amphitheatre seating bank.
1	Neolithic	A number of worked stone artefacts were thought to date to the later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age period. The most notable artefact is a large oblique transverse arrowhead, a type diagnostic of Later Neolithic industries; none of which have been previously recorded in the Chester area (Bishop, B, 2014).
2	Middle Iron Age	Evidence for a single round house, with an associated four-post structure. The four-post structure had two phases of construction which seem to have been separated by a fire. Large quantities of charred cereal were recovered from the four-post structure which has led to its interpretation as a grain store. Sixteen radiocarbon measurements were obtained on samples from the site, which can be dated broadly to the period 400-200 Cal BC.
2	Late Iron Age	Low parallel linear earth works which had survived beneath the amphitheatre seating bank in the top of the middle Iron Age cultivation soil. These earthworks had the appearance of ridge and furrow (known as cord-rig) which are likely to be associated with a small field. The Chester amphitheatre find appears to be the first record of cord-rig in Britain south of the main area of survival in Northumberland.
3	Early Roman	It is now thought that the first amphitheatre was built within the environs of Dee House during the original founding of the fortress in the AD 70's. The structure would have been relatively simple with a stone built outer wall and an earthen seating bank set around a relatively shallow arena. The early amphitheatre was served by a

		northern and southern entrance which would have provided the only access to both the arena and seating banks. The estimated seating capacity was approximately 5-6000 people; which roughly equated to the size of the resident legion plus support staff.
4	Early Roman	A suite of modifications were made to the first amphitheatre at about the time the garrison of the fortress changed in the late AD 80's. Most significant of these modifications was the operation of terracing the earlier seating bank in order to erect a timber seating stage. The base of this timber stage appears to have been anchored beneath material removed from the arena in order to lower the height of the arena floor at the same time. At the same time as the timber stage was erected external stone stair cases were added to the exterior of the outer wall in order to provide additional access to the seating areas. It is likely that the stone-built chamber adjoining the north entrance was also added during these modifications and was probably intended to serve as a <i>carcer</i> (wild beast pen) associated with entertainments within the arena.
4	Early Roman	Deposits and structures associated with the use of the first amphitheatre had survived against the external side of the outer amphitheatre wall. Within these deposits were artefacts and ecofacts associated with the operation of the building. Adjacent to the western side of the north entrance there was also evidence for a small stone structure which had been decorated internally with painted wall plaster and may have once been a small shrine.
5	Roman 2 nd century	There is a great deal of evidence to demonstrate that for most of the first half of the second century the vast majority of the legionary personnel was not present at Chester (Strickland 1999). There is no firm evidence for large scale reconstruction and re-occupation in the Chester fortress until the early years of the third century.
6	Roman 3 rd century	The amphitheatre at Chester was largely rebuilt in the late 2 nd or early 3 rd century. A new outer wall was added to the amphitheatre which increased the depth of the seating bank by nearly 2m and effectively doubled the seating capacity of the earlier structure. In tandem with this the north (and probably the south) entrance were rebuilt on a slightly different alignment and a new eastern entrance was added. The new east entrance was furnished with additional flanking walls and it has been suggested that this was to accommodate a tribunal (a kind of royal box) for high ranking officials. Whilst an opposing western entrance has been postulated on many of the reconstructed plans of the amphitheatre the presence of this entrance has not yet been demonstrated through excavation. In addition to the main entrances, eight minor entrances (<i>vomitoria</i>) were added to house vaulted stairways leading to the seating bank areas to cater for the increased numbers of spectators the building could now accommodate. The outer wall was furnished with half-round engaged columns to create the impression of a monumental building reminiscent of the Colosseum in Rome. The small chamber or <i>carcer</i> to the west of the

		north entrance may have become a shrine to the goddess Nemesis during this period. Across the centre of the arena on a north-south axis were a series of evenly spaced large stone blocks with iron fittings in the centre set with lead plugs; possibly used to secure animal or human victims in the arena. The scale and architectural complexity of this second amphitheatre marks it out as the most elaborate example so far found in Roman Britain (Wilmott, Garner & Ainsworth, 2006).
7	Roman 4 th century	Within the amphitheatre at Chester evidence for the accumulation of rubbish and building debris in the main entrances and over the arena floor marks the end of the buildings use as an amphitheatre (in the classical sense). A dispersed coin hoard found above the arena floor during excavations by Newstead and Droop in the 1930's strongly suggests that this process of dis-use and abandonment happened some time after AD 273.
8	Sub-Roman	In the centre of the arena there was evidence for a long and complex sequence of pits and postholes representing at least one rectangular building. This activity broadly spanned a period between the end of the Roman use of the amphitheatre and the 11th century; but the possibility that this represents sub-Roman occupation within the sheltering walls of the amphitheatre is compelling. To add substance to the theory there is evidence that the main east entrance was walled-up and this might indicate that the amphitheatre was made defensible as a fort for occupation or refuge. Evidence for similar reuse has been found at the Cirencester amphitheatre as well as at many continental amphitheatres such as Trier, Germany.
9	Anglo-Saxon 7 th to 9 th century	The collegiate church of St John the Baptist, still situated to the east of Dee house, was founded about 689 by King Aethelred of Mercia and a Bishop Wilfric. The choice of location is significant as it may have been connected with the memory of christian martyrs associated with the amphitheatre. It has been suggested that some of the later masonry inserted in to the amphitheatre's eastern entrance might be associated with the earliest manifestation of St John's Church and could represent the use of the entrance as a crypt (Matthews, 2003).
9	Anglo-Saxon 10 th century	Following a Viking raid on Chester in 893 Aethelflaed Queen of Mercia strengthened the decayed Roman walls and extended them down to the river in order to create a fortified town (burh) in AD 907. This period may have seen the beginning of the slighting and stone robbing of the amphitheatre to provide material for the new town walls.
9	Anglo-Saxon 10 th century	In the 10th century St John's Church was an important religious establishment, and it retained royal and aristocratic patronage. It was used by King Edgar in AD 973 for an important political gathering at which British and Viking princes demonstrated their submission by rowing Edgar up the river Dee to the Church. Fragments of several pre-conquest sandstone crosses have been recovered from St John's churchyard and approximately 40 coins from the reign of Edward the Elder (899-944) were found to the west of the present church in the

		19 th century. Construction work during the building of the Civil Justice Centre (1999-2000) uncovered two 10 th century human burials beneath what is now the car park (immediately south-east of Dee House).
10	Medieval 11 th century	The church of St John's was elevated to the status of a cathedral in 1075 (Chester's first cathedral) when the see of Lichfield was moved to Chester, and by 1086 a college of canons had been established there. In 1102 the see was transferred again to Coventry; but St John's remained an important collegiate church throughout the medieval period and retained bishop's and archdeacon's residences within its precincts.
10	Medieval 12 th to 15 th century	By the end of the 11th century there was a precinct around St John's church which included other churches and chapels as well as the bishop's residences. Some divisions within the precinct can still be identified with historic mapping and surviving standing walls. The modern pattern of roads and paths around St John's and the amphitheatre had been established by the 15th century. The presence of ecclesiastical boundaries prevented the intensive building of domestic and commercial properties along the road sides which are seen elsewhere in Chester during the medieval period. However, a small amount of development did occur along the north side of the amphitheatre site where excavation has revealed cess pits dating from c.1200 onwards. These pits would have occupied the back land of medieval tenements.
11	Tudor 16 th century	At the suppression of St John's in 1547 the college of canons was surrounded by a large precinct, which contained other college buildings, chapels and bishops and deans residences. A large cess pit located in Area C in 2005 was dated to the 16 th century and produced evidence for feasting including a large quantity of animal bones from many types of wild and domestic birds, fish bone including salmon and rays and a great deal of beef bone. Artefacts recovered from the pit included a rare tin-glazed earthenware toasting cup/jug in the shape of an owl and fragments from enamelled drinking glasses imported from Northern France. A gold sergeant-at-law ring inscribed with a latin motto was also recovered from the upper fills of this pit.
11	Tudor 16 th century	Following the suppression, the former collegiate buildings around the precinct became residences for the local gentry and a bishop's and archdeacon's residences were retained. In 1581 the choir, chapels and transepts at the east end of St John's were demolished as the church was too large for the parishioners to maintain, and it was relegated to the status of a parish church.
12	The English Civil War 1642-46	The area of the amphitheatre and St John's Church played an important role during the Civil War siege of Chester. To deny cover to the attackers many properties close to the City Walls were demolished and it is likely that some of the prestigious residences formed by the former college buildings of St John's suffered this fate.

12	The English Civil War 1642-46	Two or more canon were brought up by the attackers and installed in St John's churchyard under the cover of buildings which had not been demolished. A breach was made in the City Walls within the vicinity of what is now the Roman Gardens; but the subsequent assault was beaten back by fierce resistance. Excavations to the east of Dee House in Areas B and C produced over 100 pieces of spent lead shot of varying calibres from pistol to musket balls; other items included lead caps from bandolier cartridges and a powder-flask spout.
13	18 th century	Dee House and its gardens were built over the southern and western parts of the Roman amphitheatre in c.1730, and another mansion called St John's House with its gardens was built over the northern and eastern parts of the amphitheatre at a slightly later date. Dee House is likely to have been built for James Comberbach (d.1735), a former mayor and alderman of Chester. Its plot was originally within the former precincts of the medieval collegiate church of St John and its boundaries were influenced by the layout of the college. To the east, south and west of Dee House were formal gardens of which the southern one was laid out into four rectangular beds separated by paths. The house itself was set back from the public road rather than fronting directly on to the street. The area between the house and the gates was occupied by a carriage-turning circle, and to the west were a stable block and coach-house (Figure 27). To the east of Dee House the remains of a later 18 th century cellared building were found on the eastern property boundary in Area B of the recent excavations (2004-05).
14	19 th century	Dee House became part of the Roman Catholic resurgence in 1854 when it was acquired by the Faithful Companions of Jesus as a convent and girls' boarding school. In 1867 a purpose built three-storey chapel block and schoolrooms were added by the Liverpool architect Edmund Kirby (1838-1920). The northern section of the range along Souter's Lane, appears to be contemporary and is probably also by Kirby. In the last quarter of the 19 th century a three-storey in-fill block, roughly matching the original house in its details, was built in the angle formed by the main block and service wing. During this period the gardens were also extensively altered when the gardens between Dee House and St John's church (formerly belonging to St John's House) were acquired by the convent. The gardens included a large lawn, a prayer walk and a prospect mound which was surmounted by a statue of Our Lady (Ainsworth & Wilmott, 2005).
14	19 th century	Towards the end of the century the area suffered a significant loss of Georgian buildings with the demolition of five of the eight large houses built during the 18 th century. The tower of St John's which had dominated the area since the medieval period collapsed in 1881. The open character of the wider area was retained with the formalisation of the earlier garden and park landscape of Cholmondeley House in to the Grosvenor Park in 1867.
14	20 th	In 1925 Dee House was acquired by the Ursuline Order and new

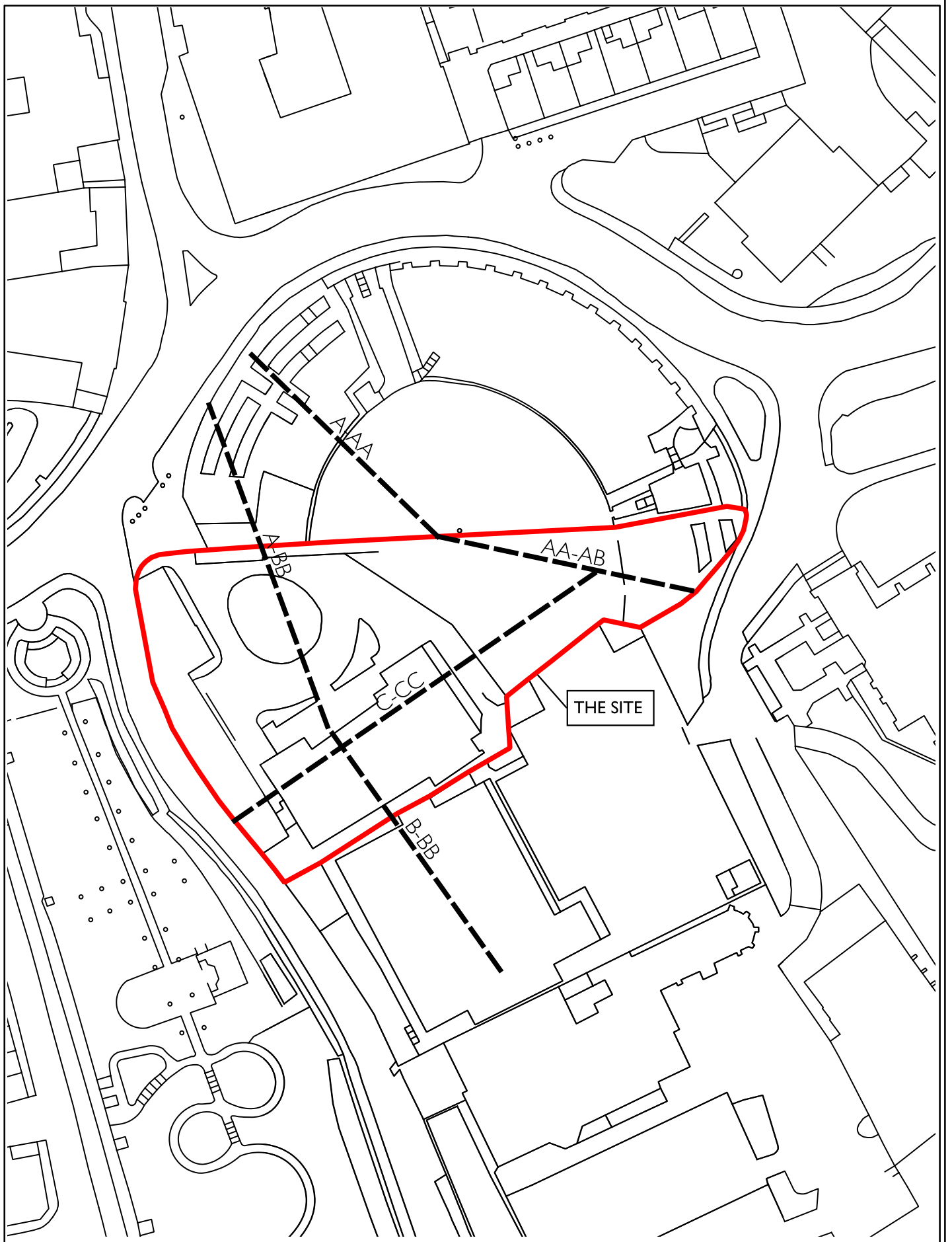
	century	school buildings were subsequently erected to the south; leading to the discovery of the amphitheatre in 1929. Further wings were added in 1955 and 1960. The opening of a new Catholic high school nearby led to the closure of the school at Dee House in September 1976. The building was acquired by Post Office Telephones (later British Telecom) and converted into a telephone exchange with offices and training facilities. It stayed in BT's hands until 1993, when it was sold to Chester City Council. In recent years it has been boarded up as a result of a fire.
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Table 2- Summary of archaeological and historical background

8. Implications for Future Development

- 8.1. As described in Section 5 (above) five cross sections were constructed through the site to provide information relating to the depths of known archaeology and how it related to current ground levels (Figure 6). These sections are intended to be a means of demonstrating the scope for alterations within the site. It was agreed after discussions with Tony Wilmott of English Heritage that 'significant archaeology' on the site refers to 18th century and earlier deposits; whilst 19th and 20th century archaeology can be classed as modern.
- 8.2. It needs to be noted that specific heights across the site vary owing to accidents of survival; in some areas later activity will have adversely affected the height of significant archaeology. As a result both the cross sections and the incremental plan should be seen as schematic and for illustrative purposes only. A more accurate indication of the known height of significant archaeology is shown as a series of spot heights in Figure 7.
- 8.3. Cross section A-AA (Figure 8) illustrates the relative heights for the various displayed elements of the Roman Amphitheatre including the arena floor. Whilst this is outside of the site boundary it serves to show the height of archaeology on the displayed part of the monument for means of comparison. On the north-west seating bank the top of significant archaeology and the top of Roman archaeology are the same; and are most shallow at the north-western end of section A-AA at a height of 19.32m OD. The top of the Roman arena floor was re-exposed in 2001 in Trench I at a height of 16.48m OD and as the arena floor is relatively flat this height can be projected out to the edge of the arena wall.
- 8.4. Cross section AA-AB (Figure 9) illustrates the anticipated depths of both significant archaeology and the top of Roman archaeology across the eastern part of the site; based on results from Areas B and C of the 2004-05 excavations. The present ground level across this area is an average of 20.30m OD. The top of significant archaeology in Area C was deepest on the north-western end of the cross section at 19.16m OD giving a maximum acceptable disturbance depth of 1.14m. This becomes progressively more shallow further south-east along the cross section with the top of significant archaeology rising to 20.03m OD at the south-eastern end; a maximum

FIGURE 6 // Locations of cross-sections



THE SITE

AA-AB

AA-AB

C-C

B-BB

0 20 m



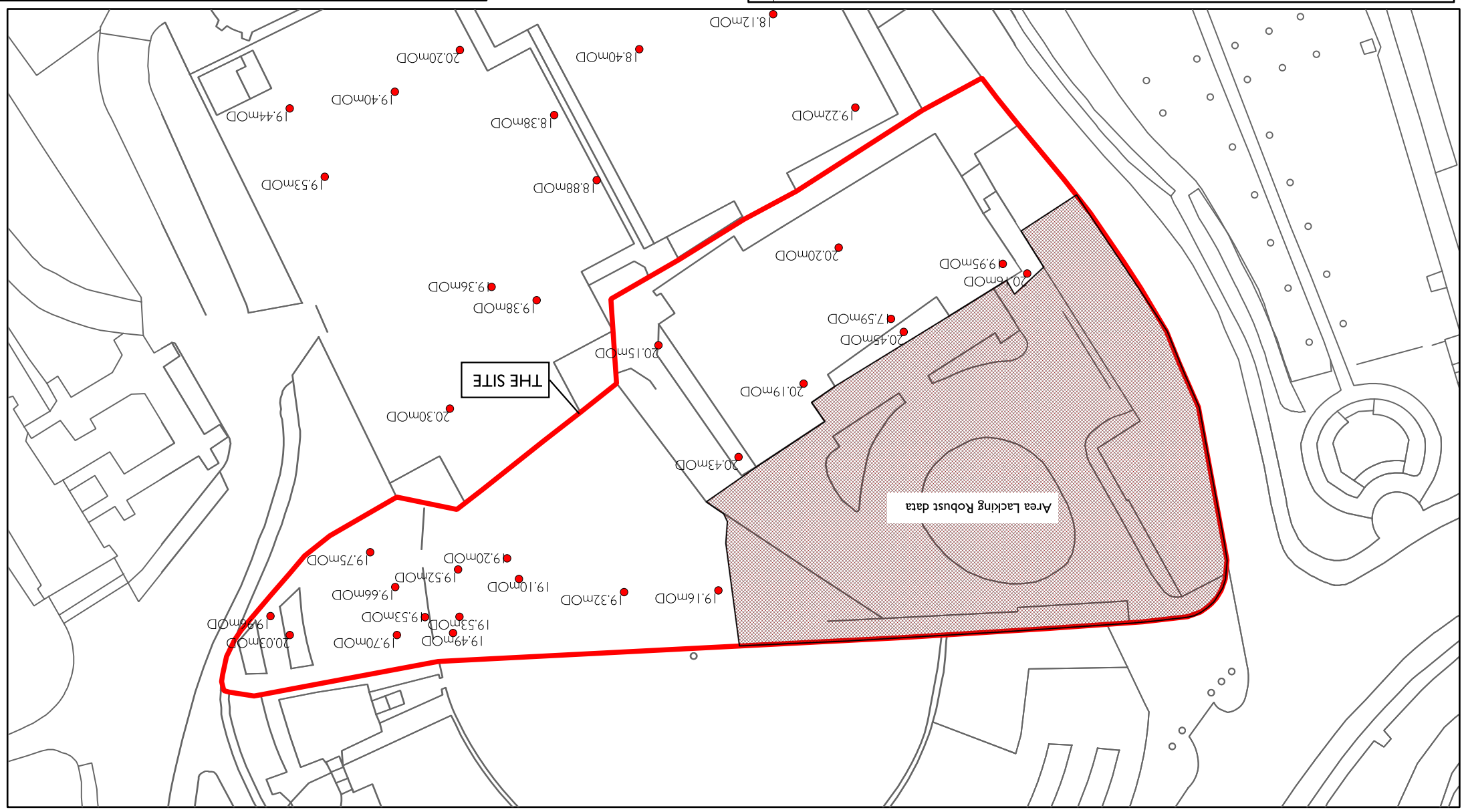
PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Locations of cross-section figures 8 to 13

DOC REF: LPI827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHAEOLOGY

FIGURE 7 // Levels of Significant Archaeology



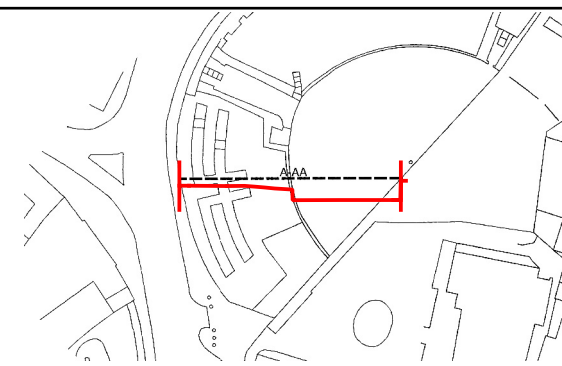
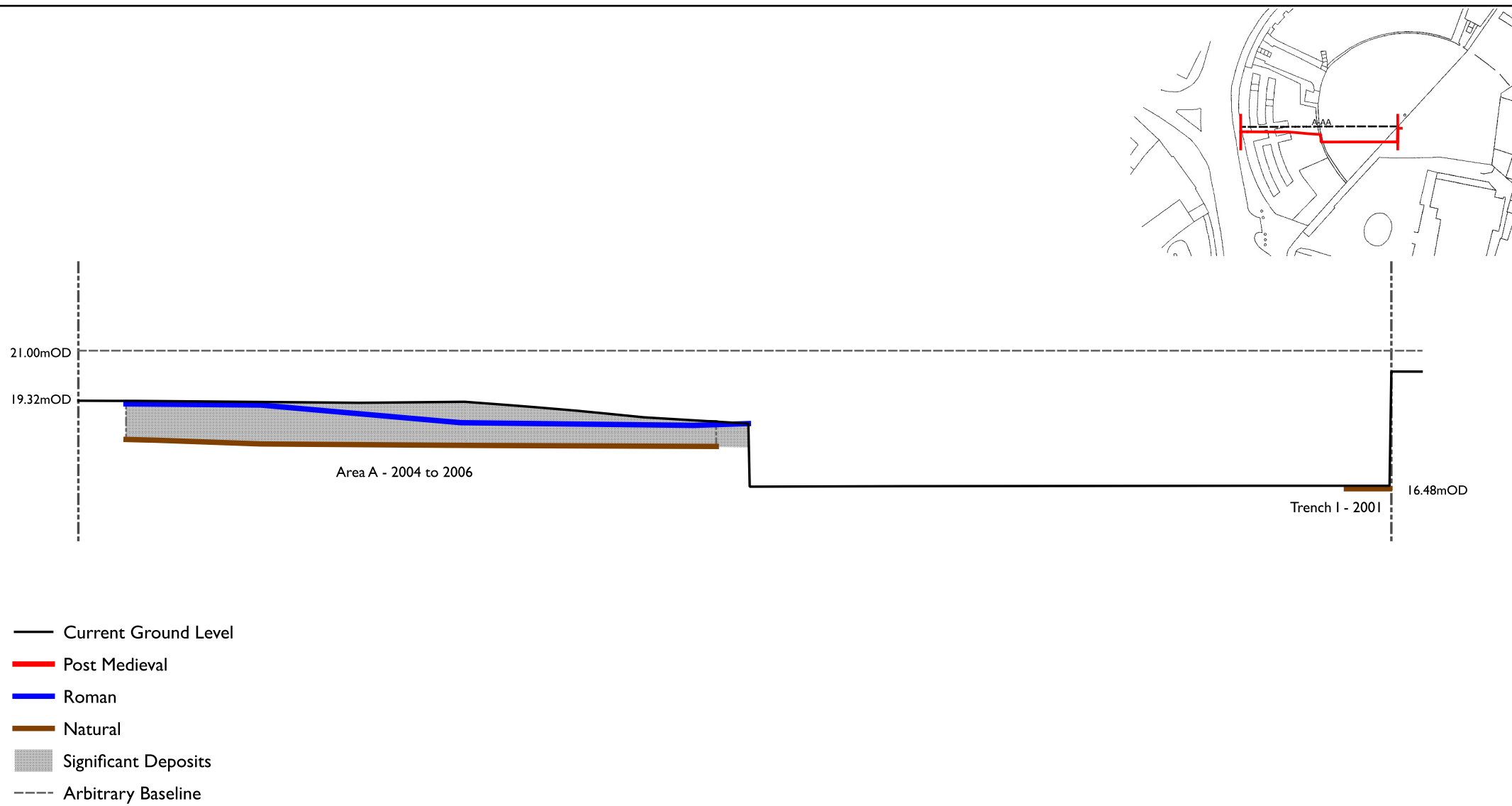
DESCRIPTION // Plan showing known levels of significant archaeology

PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-V1

L-P:ARCHAEOLOGY

FIGURE 8 // Cross Section A-AA



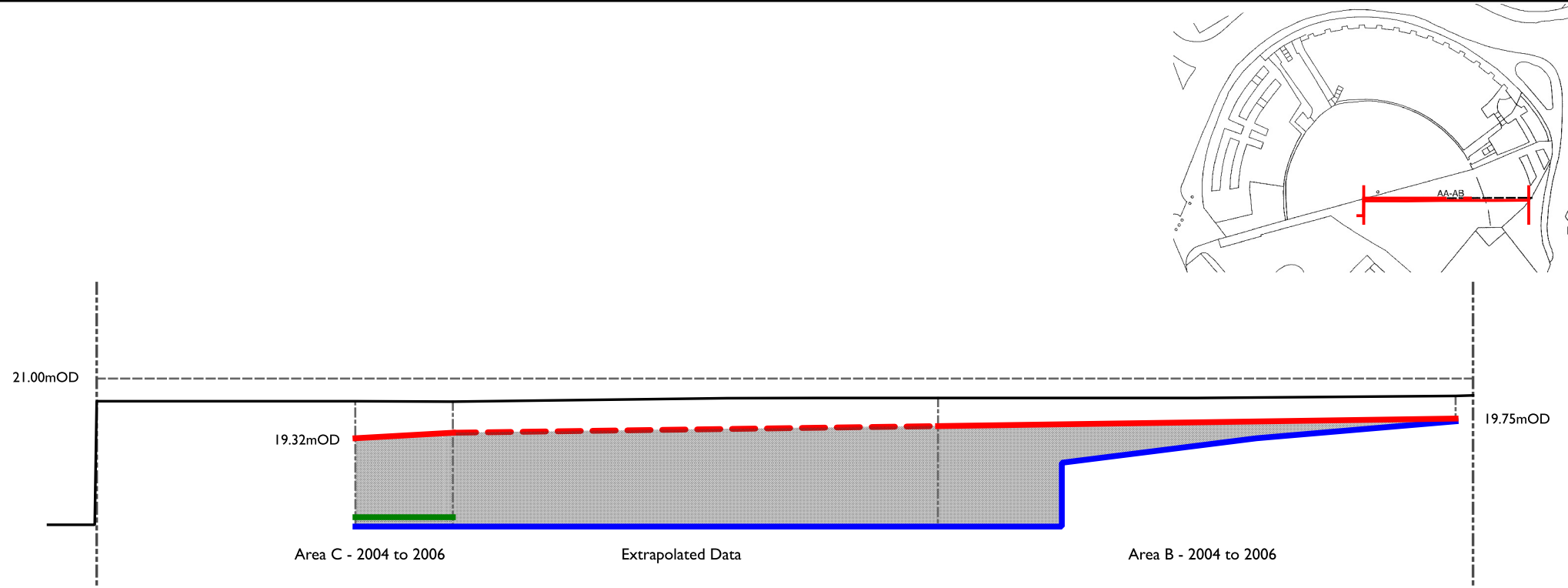
PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Cross Section A-AA

DOC REF: LPI827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

FIGURE 9 // Cross Section AA-AB



- Current Ground Level
- Post Medieval
- Saxon
- Roman
- █ Significant Deposits
- - - Arbitrary Baseline

0 5 m

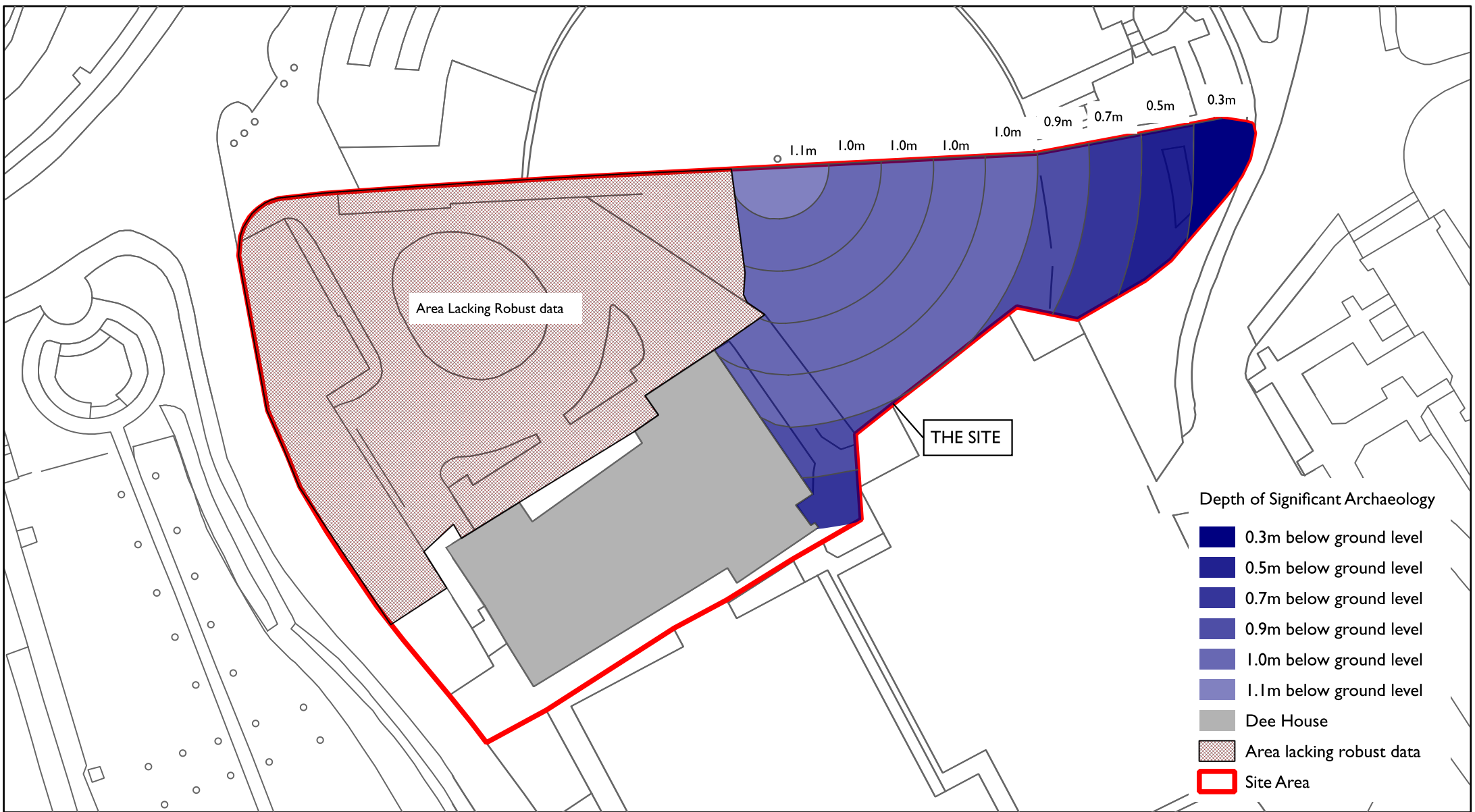
PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Cross Section AA-AB

DOC REF: LPI827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHAEOLOGY

FIGURE 10 // Incremental Depths of Archaeology



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Plan showing the incremental depth of significant archaeology for the area to the north-east of Dee House and areas lacking robust archaeological data

DOC REF: LPI827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHAEOLOGY

FIGURE 11 // Cross Section A-BB



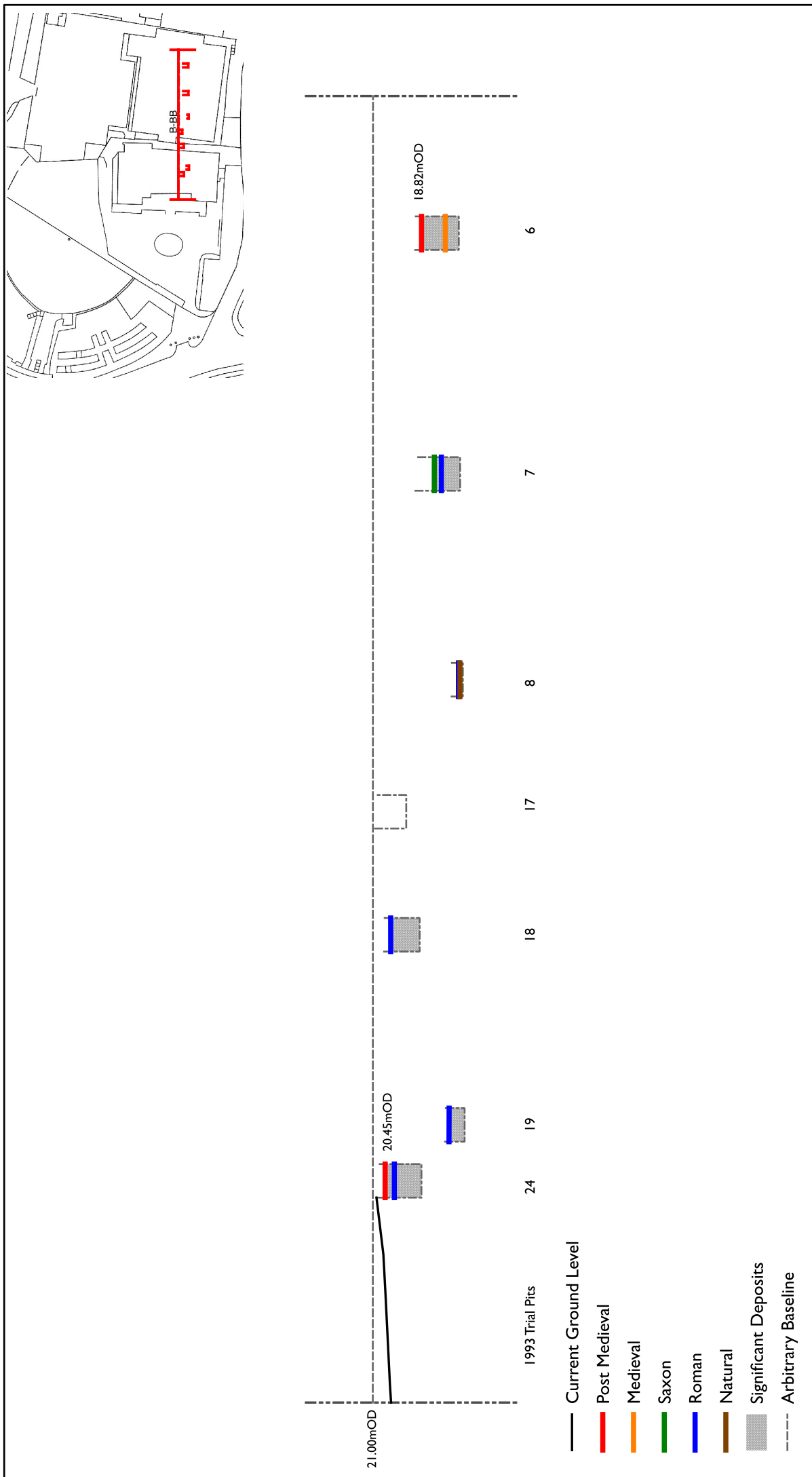
PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Cross Section A-BB

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L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

FIGURE 12 // Cross Section B-BB



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Cross Section B-BB

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

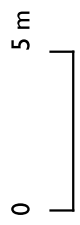
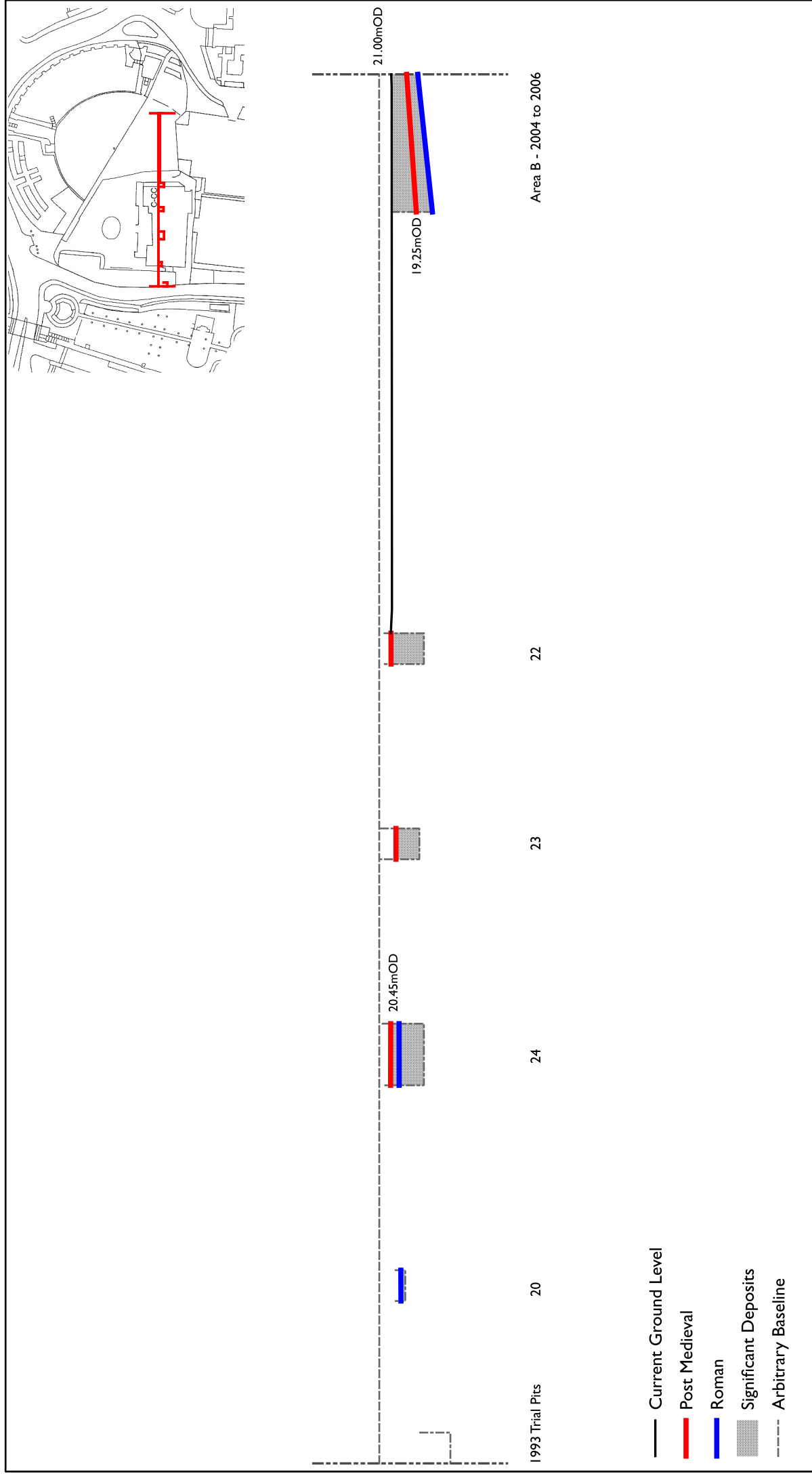


FIGURE 13 // Cross Section C-CC

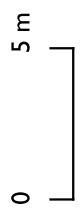


PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Cross Section C-CC

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY



acceptable disturbance depth of 0.27m. The incremental depth of significant archaeology (at increments of 0.1m) has been depicted as a graphic for the area to the north-east of Dee House (Figure 10).

8.5. Cross section A-BB (Figure 11) illustrates the anticipated depths of both significant archaeology and the top of Roman archaeology based on excavation results from 1932, 1993 and 2004-06. Furthermore, it highlights the area of the Dee House forecourt where robust archaeological data is currently lacking (also shown in plan on Figure 9). The top of significant archaeology is only known at the south-eastern end of the cross section where a post-medieval cobbled surface was encountered at 20.45m OD in 1993 Trench 24. Modern ground level was recorded at 20.84m OD in this location giving a maximum acceptable disturbance depth of 0.39m.

8.6. Cross section B-BB (Figure 12) illustrates the anticipated depths of both significant archaeology and the top of Roman archaeology beneath Dee House based on excavation results from 1993; the section also extends south-east beneath the present Trident House building. The height of significant archaeology in 1993 Trench 19 represents the truncated remains of the Roman Amphitheatre beneath the Dee House cellar floor at 17.57m OD giving a maximum acceptable disturbance depth of 0.20m within the cellar. The top of significant archaeology in 1993 Trench 18 is at 20.20m OD; this represents the top of the surviving Amphitheatre wall at a depth of 0.75m beneath the existing floor surface outside of the cellar footprint.

8.7. Cross section C-CC (Figure 13) illustrates the anticipated depths of both significant archaeology and the top of Roman archaeology based on excavation results from 1993, 1994 and 2004-05. The height of significant archaeology in 1993 Trenches 22 and 23 represents the top of 18th century brick walls at 20.43m OD and 20.19m OD or 0.32m and 0.74m beneath existing ground level respectively. The levels in 1993 Trench 24 are discussed in section 8.5 (above). The height of significant archaeology in 1993 Trench 20 represents the top of Roman Amphitheatre seating bank deposits at a depth of 0.25m beneath existing ground level.

8.8. Within the Dee House site two areas have been identified where robust data on the nature of below ground archaeological remains is lacking (Figure 10).

8.9. The most significant area is the Dee House forecourt where there is currently no

archaeological data available. This area is believed to contain the postulated main west entrance to the Roman amphitheatre. Recent analysis has cast some doubt on whether a western entrance does in fact exist as it remains unproven; and there are a number of continental parallels where the short axis of the amphitheatre does not have opposing main entrances. The depth at which deposits associated with the Roman seating bank survive in this area is also currently unknown. It is anticipated that the area overlying the former Roman arena is likely to have a similar depositional sequence to that encountered in Area C of the 2004-05 excavations.

- 8.10.** To a lesser extent the area immediately to the east of the Dee House chapel wing is also lacking in robust data. This area is believed to entirely overlie the southern half of the Roman amphitheatre arena but the two trial trenches excavated here in 1994 did not reach a great enough depth to encounter anything earlier than later post-medieval deposits and as such it is hard to compare this area with the known archaeology recorded in Area C of the 2004-05 excavations.
- 8.11.** A small-scale archaeological evaluation exercise could probably provide the data required to fill these current gaps in our current knowledge.

9. The significance of the archaeological remains

9.1. The site overlies part of a Scheduled Monument, known as Roman Amphitheatre (National Ref no:1004638), which is also Grade I listed as Remains of Roman Amphitheatre (List entry no:1375863). Scheduled Monuments are nationally important sites that have been given legal protection by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport due to their archaeological or historic interest. This monument should be considered of international significance, largely because it is the largest of its kind in Britain.

9.2. The site also contains the Grade II Listed Building known as Dee House (Figure 3). There are 3 grades of listed building: Grade I are buildings of exceptional interest; Grade II* are particularly important buildings of more than special interest; and Grade II are buildings of special interest, justifying every effort to preserve them.

9.3. The Chester Urban Archaeological Database (UAD) identifies the study area including the site of Dee House and the Roman amphitheatre as Character Zone 21 (<http://www.cheshirearchaeology.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/HCH16768.pdf>). In summary the UAD states of the archaeological potential:

The Roman Amphitheatre is an exceptionally well-preserved Scheduled Monument and Listed Building, with a history of high-standard archaeological investigation dating back to the 1920s. This monument should be considered of international significance, largely because it is the largest of its kind in Britain. While its northern part has been extensively excavated and is largely open to public view, the southern, larger portion is found below the listed building Dee House, and archaeological testing in this area has proved that much of the structure survives in situ.

9.4. The summary of Character Zone 21 goes on to list the key considerations as:

9.4.1. This zone has preserved archaeological remains that may influence international perspectives on the development of Chester, with the potential for future discoveries of significant archaeological remains from the Iron Age to post medieval periods.

9.4.2. Built Heritage:

- ◆ *This zone is within a Conservation Area.*

- ◆ *Care should be taken to preserve the built character and visual setting of listed buildings within this zone, which includes Dee House.*

9.4.3. Below Ground:

- ◆ *This zone is within an Area of Archaeological Importance and contains a Scheduled Monument.*
- ◆ *There is strong potential for below ground remains to survive at a relatively shallow depth.*
- ◆ *Future archaeological discoveries could relate to complex deeply stratified deposits, and planned development in this area should take the likelihood of such discoveries under consideration.*

9.5. To the east of Zone 21 is the adjoining Character Zone 27 which is focused upon St John's church. The zone's character is defined primarily by its stock of 6 standing, historic listed buildings, in addition to the presence of a Scheduled Monument. Likewise, to the west are Character Zones 12 and 20 which include adjoining elements of a scheduled monument (the City Walls). These adjoining zones are fundamentally entwined with the significance and setting of the amphitheatre and Dee House.

9.6. Conservation Principles (EH, 2008) identifies four types of heritage value that an asset may hold: aesthetic, communal, historic and evidential value. This is simply another way of analysing its significance. Understanding the nature of the significance is important to understanding the best means of conservation:

- ◆ Evidential value derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity. In the absence of written records, the material record (archaeological deposits) provides the only source of evidence about the distant past. Age is therefore a strong indicator of relative evidential value.
- ◆ Historical value derives from the way in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. This can be illustrative, which largely depends upon visibility; or associative, which is linked to notable events, movements or people. The historic value of places is not easily diminished by change or partial replacement.

- ◆ Aesthetic value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place. These values may be related to the age of a place but they may be amenable to restoration and enhancement.
- ◆ Communal value derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it or for whom it figures in their collective experience of memory.

9.7. The heritage assets within the study area have been identified and summarised in this desk-based assessment as a series of themes (Themes 1 to 14 in Section 7 and Appendix 3). These themes are aspects of a greater whole and as such should not be considered individually but rather in their collective value. As such Dee House and the Roman Amphitheatre can clearly be seen to offer all four types of heritage value:

- ◆ Evidential value can be demonstrated to be strong with a long and complex time depth going back to the early Mesolithic (Theme 1). In particular the asset has the potential to provide significant evidential value to a number of key periods in Chester's history (see Themes 1 to 9);
- ◆ Historical value can be measured as high in terms of the visible fabric of Dee House, the exposed section of the Amphitheatre, St John's Church and the City Walls. Whilst the associative aspects have been clearly demonstrated in Themes 1 to 14;
- ◆ The aesthetic value of the study area can be clearly demonstrated through the Chester Amphitheatre Project which has generated a number of academic and general publications along with a range of media events ranging from newspaper articles, television and radio broadcasts to an international conference (see Section 6 and Appendix 2);
- ◆ The communal value can be demonstrated by the emotions the site has invoked in the local population since the discovery of the amphitheatre in 1929 (see Section 6 and Appendix 2). This not only relates to the Roman Amphitheatre but also to several generations of former pupils of the Dee House convent school for whom the site holds a collective memory.

9.8. The heritage values discussed above need to be accommodated within any future development on the site. A summary of how these values might relate to

development proposals is provided in Table 3 below:

Value	Relationship to Potential Development
Evidential	Any ground disturbance on the site will have an impact on the evidential value in terms of both the removal of deposits and artefacts and the accumulation of new evidence.
Historical	The historic value of the site is not easily diminished by change or partial replacement.
Aesthetic	The aesthetic value of the site could be enhanced through a development which provides fresh interpretation opportunities leading to new educational outlets and the wider dissemination of existing knowledge.
Communal	The communal value of the site could be enhanced through sensitive development which serves to contribute towards the telling of the Dee House and Amphitheatre story.

Table 3- Summary of heritage value's relationship to potential development

10. Setting Considerations for Future Development

- 10.1. The Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning, Note 3 (EH, 2014), identifies that a development proposal should be considered in terms of whether it is capable of affecting the contribution of a heritage asset's setting, to its significance or, the appreciation of this significance. In this context, it should be considered that any future development proposal on the Dee House site will not only have to consider the listed building and the amphitheatre scheduled monument; but will also need to take in to account its impact on the neighbouring heritage assets of St John's Church and the City Walls.
- 10.2. There is a recommended check list of attributes which should be considered when assessing the contribution made to a heritage asset by its setting. These are listed under two sub-headings: The asset's physical surroundings and the experience of the asset (EH, 2014).
- 10.3. When considering the physical surroundings and the experience of the asset, the Dee House site has already been considered with reference to other heritage assets in the area (Section 7). In terms of the development of the site over time it can be seen that there are strong links between the Dee House site and that of St John's.
- 10.4. The 'grain' of the surrounding streetscape can be seen to have been influenced by both the presence of the Roman amphitheatre and then by the medieval precinct of St John's collegiate church. Historic mapping can demonstrate that many of the present property boundaries also owe their origins to these two influential establishments.
- 10.5. Land use in this area of Chester is dominated by green open spaces such as the Roman Gardens, St John's churchyard and Grosvenor Park. These open spaces are simply the latest manifestation of a landscape traditionally designed to be remote from the urban congestion of the city centre; first through an ecclesiastical enclave and later by gentrification and the creation of a villa suburb.
- 10.6. At present these green open spaces are given over to communal recreation and there is a clear pedestrian link between the various sites in a linear route which at one end connects with the city walls via steps by the Newgate. The key link in this route is provided by the walkway running along the northern edge of the Dee House

site which was only recently installed as part of the Chester Amphitheatre Project. Indeed this walkway mirrors an earlier short lived route across the amphitheatre (prior to excavation) from the 1950's known as the amphitheatre gardens. All of these areas share the commonality of being separated from the city centre by the inner ring road and being connected to the riverside by a number of ancient thoroughfares (such as Souter's Lane and the pedestrian routes either side of St John's church).

10.7. These open spaces share a common theme through the presentation of ancient remains for public appreciation. This is achieved in varying ways with Roman stone architectural fragments from elsewhere in the city displayed in the Roman Gardens and a number of relocated stone arches on display in Grosvenor Park. The in situ remains of the Roman fortress southeast angle tower and the northern half of the Roman amphitheatre represent the largest collection of Roman remains visible anywhere in the city. Interpretation is through a mixture of laid out markers and information panels which are strategically spaced around the monuments. In contrast, St John's church forms the dual role of a functioning place of worship and romantic ruin. The present vicar (Rev. David Chesters) is very active in promoting the history and significance of his church.

10.8. Historic materials are dominated by the local red sandstone which makes up the main fabric of the City Walls, the remains of the Roman amphitheatre and St John's Church. This material would have been locally sourced and ancient stone quarries are known to the south of St John's Church as well as beneath what is now the Roman Gardens. More recent structures such as Dee House and the former St John's school are of red brick which reflects both changing fashions and industrial developments within the construction industry.

10.9. Key views both from outside of the site looking in and inside of the site looking out are considered to be as follows:

- ◆ A key view of the Dee House site can be seen as you approach the site from the north end of St John Street at the junction of Foregate Street (Plates 1 & 2). This view neatly frames the Dee House complex which forms a dominant focal point whilst the remains of the Amphitheatre are largely

imperceptible.

- ◆ A second key view of the site can be gained from the top of the City Walls looking south-east, either at the location of the Roman angle tower or on the top of the Newgate (Plates 3 to 5). Both locations provide a good view of the displayed remains of the Roman amphitheatre with the remains of St John's Church in the background. From this view point the western range of the Dee House ancillary buildings can be seen as an obstacle in both the view of the main building.
- ◆ From St John's Church there is another key view looking west which takes in the eastern elevation of the Dee House chapel wing (Plates 8 & 9) and the displayed section of the Roman Amphitheatre. Here again the western range of the Dee House ancillary buildings can be seen as an obstacle, this time to a view of the city walls. This view has a historical resonance with regard to the Civil War siege of Chester and a breach in the City Walls caused by parliamentary artillery placed in St John's churchyard; the breach is still visible as a later repair to the Walls at the Roman Gardens.
- ◆ A key view looking out of the site is looking north over the displayed remains of the Roman amphitheatre (Plates 6 & 7) and northwest to the city walls and the Wolfeld gate. To the northeast and east the view is mainly dominated by 19th and 20th century brick buildings.



Plate 1: View of Dee House from the north end of St John Street. Looking south.



Plate 2: View of Dee House from the south end of St John Street. Looking south.



Plate 3: Stitched view of St John's Church, Dee House, the Roman Amphitheatre and Roman Gardens from the City Walls. Looking south-east.



Plate 4: Stitched view of the Roman Amphitheatre, Dee House and St John's Church from the Newgate. Looking East.



Plate 5: Stitched view of Dee House, Trident House and Roman Gardens from the City Walls. Looking east.



Plate 6: Stitched view of the inner ring-road including elements of the Roman Amphitheatre and St. John's Church from the Dee House site. Looking north and north-east.



Plate 7: View towards the south end of St John Street across elements of the Roman Amphitheatre from the Dee House site. Looking north and north-east.



Plate 8: View towards the Dee House chapel wing and Trident House from St John's churchyard. Looking west.



Plate 9: View towards the Dee House chapel wing and the City Walls from St John's Church. Looking west.

- 10.10. There are currently no details or proposals in place for development within the Dee House site and this precludes any specific assessment of the effect development might have to the setting of the heritage assets. The Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning, Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (English Heritage 2014) sets out a list of attributes which should be considered when assessing the effect made to a heritage asset's setting by a proposed development. These are listed under five sub-headings: Location and siting of development; the form and appearance of the development; other effects; permanence of development; and longer term consequential effects (EH, 2014).
- 10.11. Given the heritage assets within the site area, locations for new development which would avoid an impact on the setting of both Dee House and the Amphitheatre are limited. Development within the site area will also have an impact on the setting of the adjacent heritage assets of St John's Church, the City Walls and the City Conservation Area.
- 10.12. As there are currently no proposals under consideration, it will be important that all new proposals should aim to enhance the setting of the heritage assets within and adjacent to the site area and minimise harm, as set out in The Setting of Heritage Assets English Heritage Guidance 2011, page 20 Step 4 Maximising enhancement and minimising harm. The enhancement of the setting of all the heritage assets within and adjacent to the site area should therefore form a key consideration in the location and design of any new development.
- 10.13. Amongst the other effects of any development at Dee house, public access and amenity use should be a key consideration. The retention of public access along the northern boundary of the site is vital to maintaining a connection between the city walls and St John's Church; whilst also providing a unique perspective from which to view the displayed remains of the Roman Amphitheatre.
- 10.14. The permanence of any development at Dee House should give due consideration to the reversibility of any physical changes. The entire site overlies a significant part of the southern side to the Roman Amphitheatre. In the recent past there has been both a popular and a political desire to see this part of the monument excavated and

displayed; as already undertaken on the northern half. English Heritage has however made its position clear regarding “the over-riding need to protect and retain in situ the nationally important archaeological remains” (See Appendix 1).

10.15. The current site ownership is with the local authority. A change to private ownership could be seen as a negative outcome of development in the longer term if further excavation and display of the Amphitheatre was to be reconsidered in the future. It has already been identified that the setting has a very heavy leaning towards open space and public amenity which is strongly driven by the heritage assets of the site. Future use and development of the Dee House site should aim to preserve and enhance this.

10.16. Economically the site is divorced from the commercial centre of Chester by the physical barriers of the inner ring road to the north and the city walls to the west. Further to the east along the section of the inner ring road known as Pepper Street there is a rapidly developing dining quarter with an expanding number of restaurants and eaterys. The presence of a law court to the south and an active church to the east further influence the commercial potential of future development. The strong economic drivers for the area are associated with tourism, recreation and seasonal public entertainment (such as concerts and theatres in the park or open air cinema at the Amphitheatre or art installations in the Roman Gardens). The site has already begun to develop as a vital nodal point linking the City Walls with St John's Church and Grosvenor Park to the east and west as well as the riverside and the Groves to the south.

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AERIAL VIEW OF CHESTER FROM THE EAST IN 1855 BY JOHN MCGAHEY. GROSVENOR MUSEUM COLLECTIONS.

ELECTRONIC

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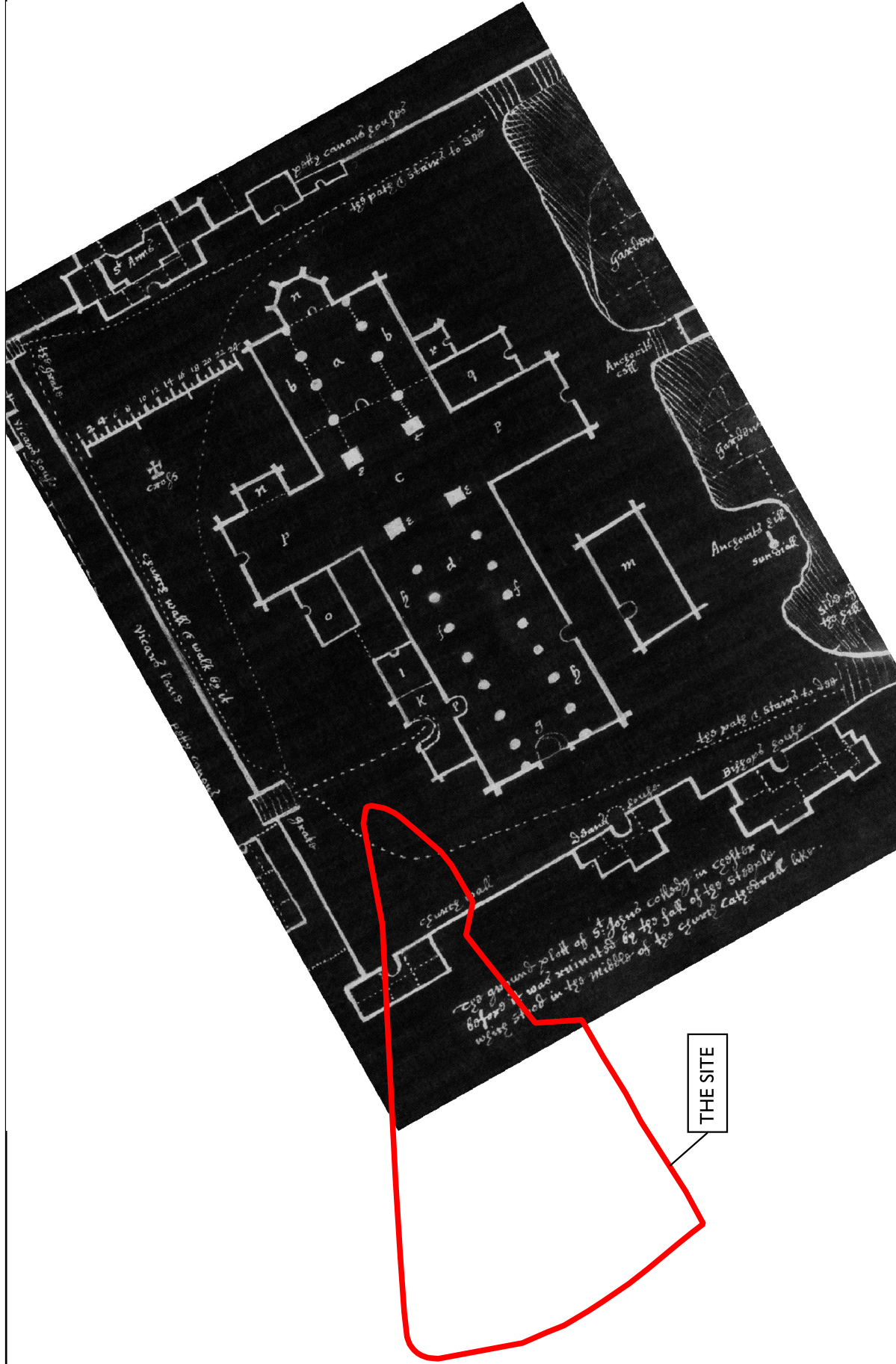
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The Setting of Heritage Assets (English Heritage 2011)

Scheduled Monuments Annex 1 Department for Culture Media and Sport 2010 - includes the eight criteria commonly used to assess the national importance of monuments

FIGURES

FIGURE 14 // 17th Century St John's



THE SITE

PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

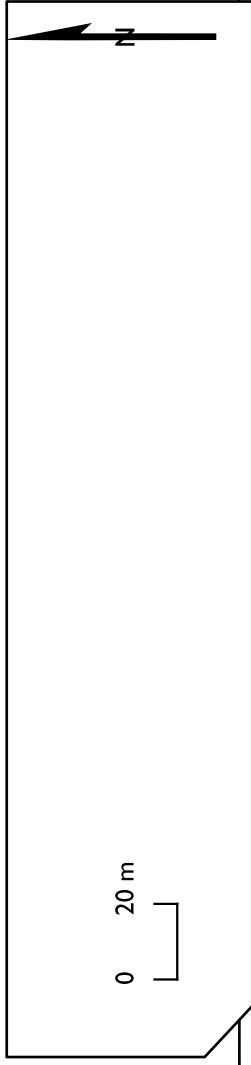
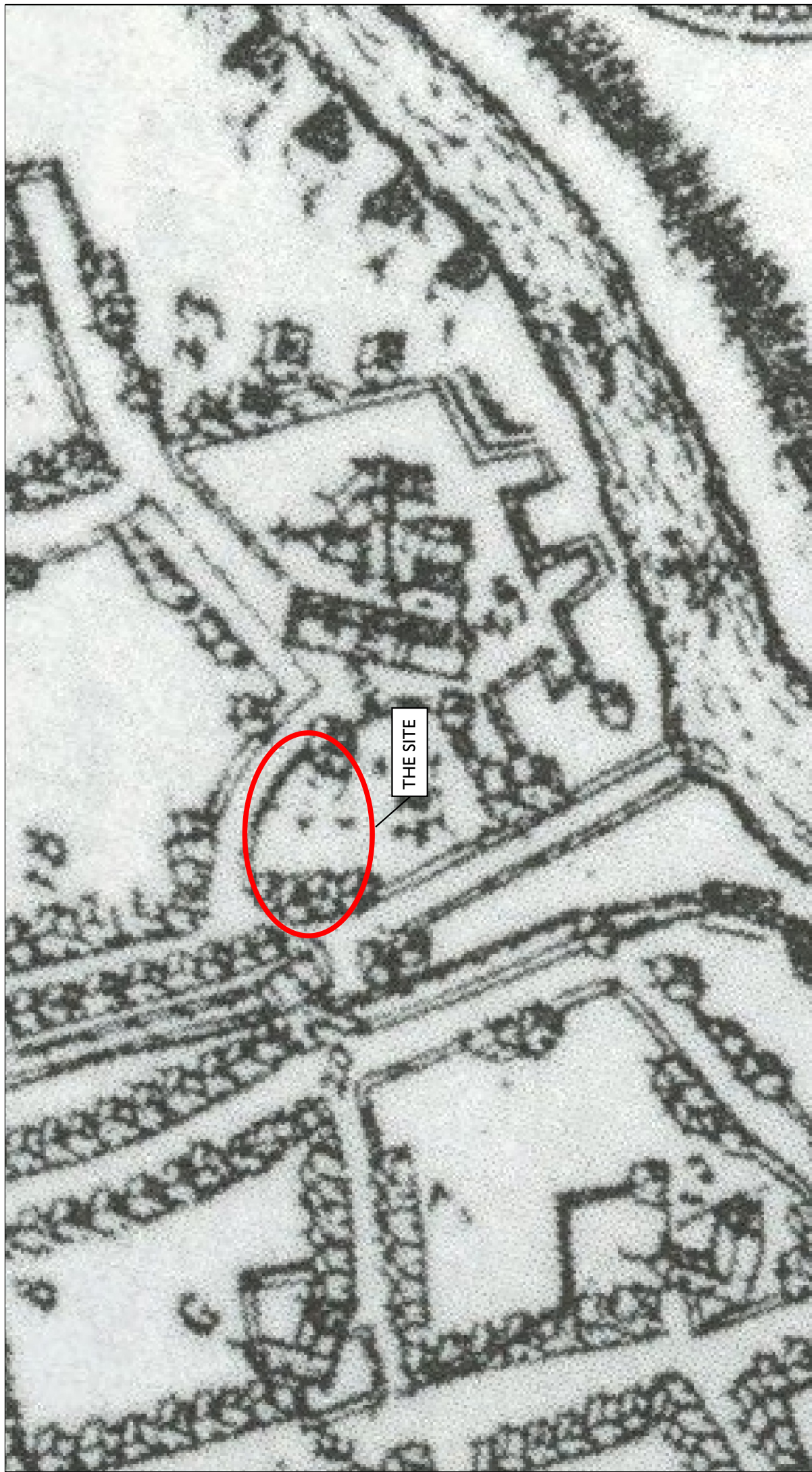
DESCRIPTION // Sketch plan of St John's Church by Randle Holme (17th century)

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

0 20 m

FIGURE 15 // Plan of Chester 1610



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Plan of Chester 1610 by John Speed

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

FIGURE 16 // Plan of Chester 1653



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Plan of Chester 1653 by William Batenham (1813-30) after

Wenceslas Hollar (1607-77)

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

0 20 m

0

FIGURE 17 // Plan of Chester 1745



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Map of Chester by Alexander de Lavalax 1745

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

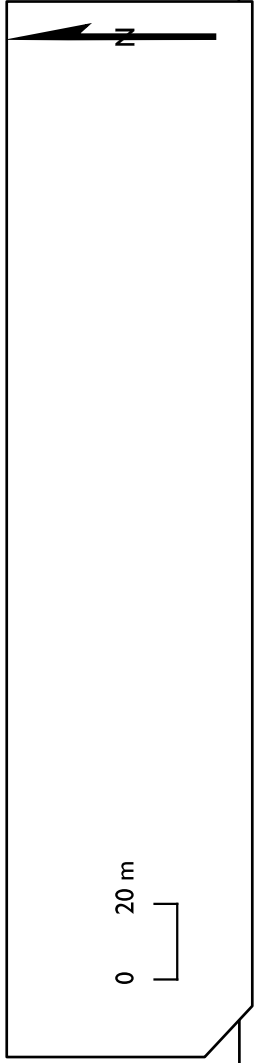
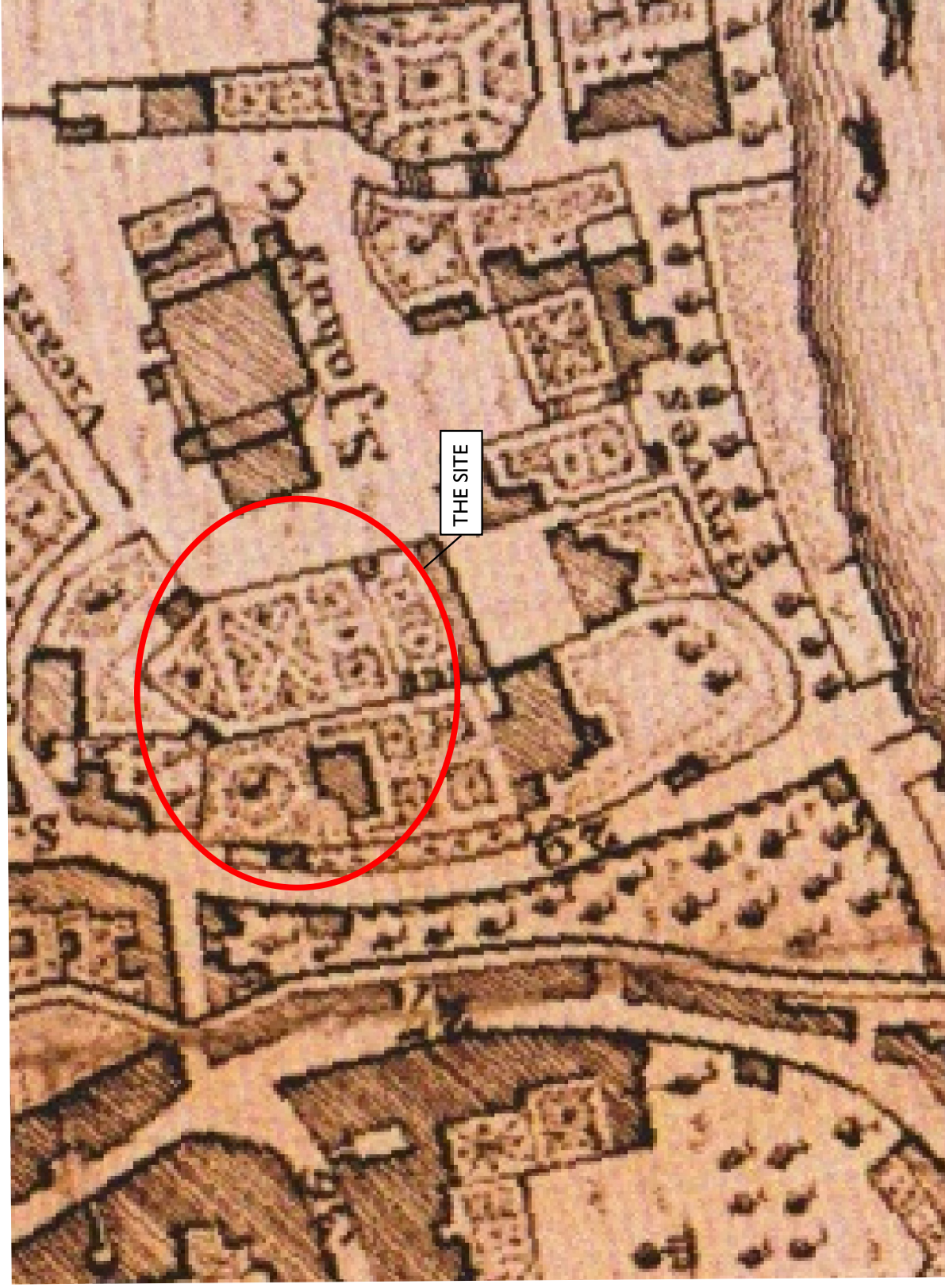
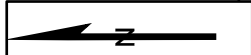


FIGURE 18 // Map of Chester 1791



0 20 m



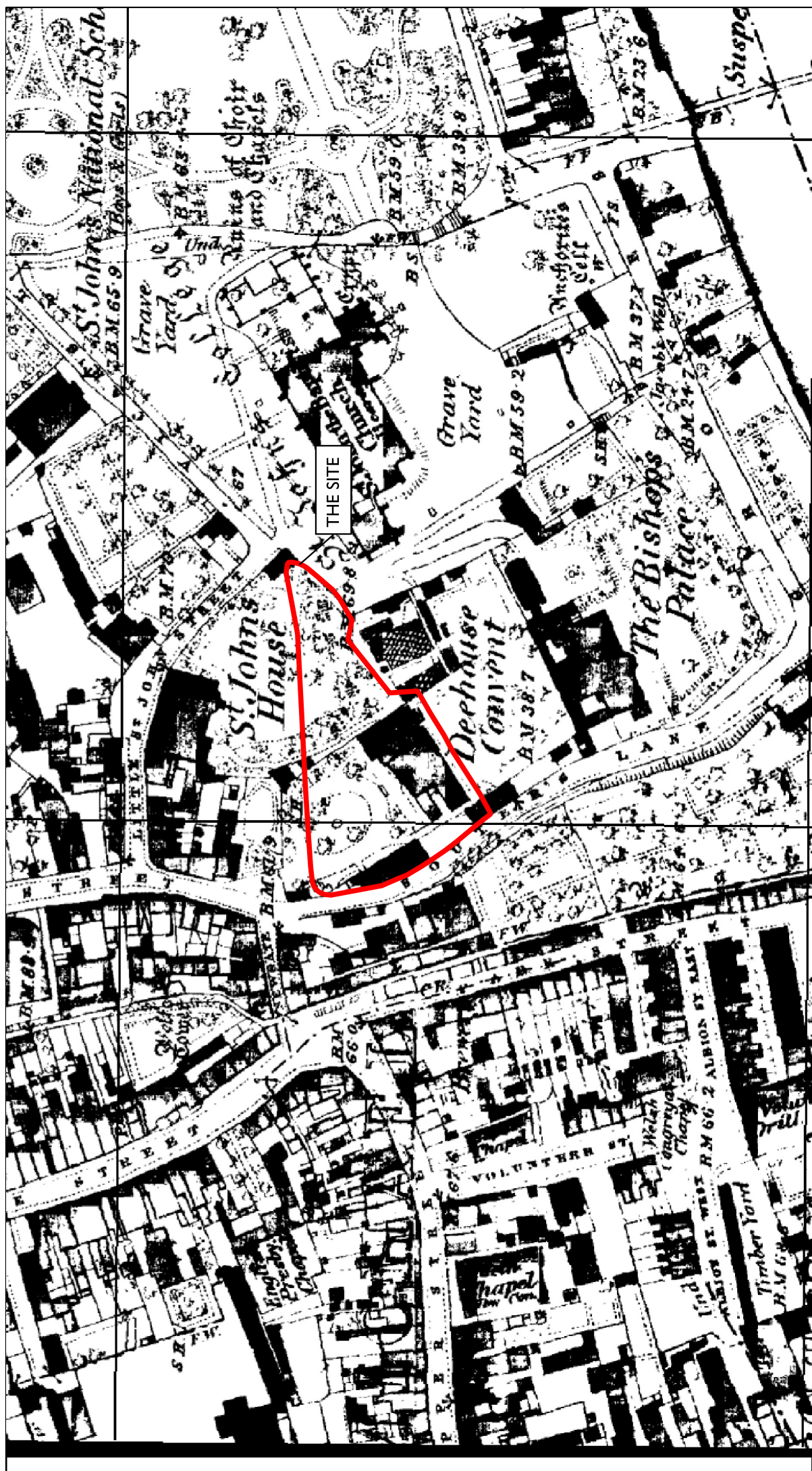
PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Map of Chester by Murray and Stuart 1791

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

FIGURE 19 // OS Map 1874



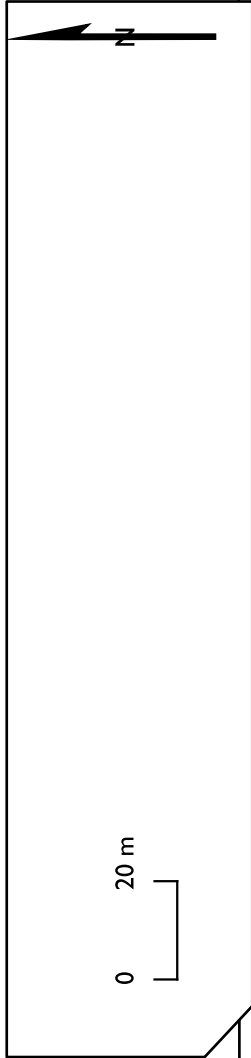
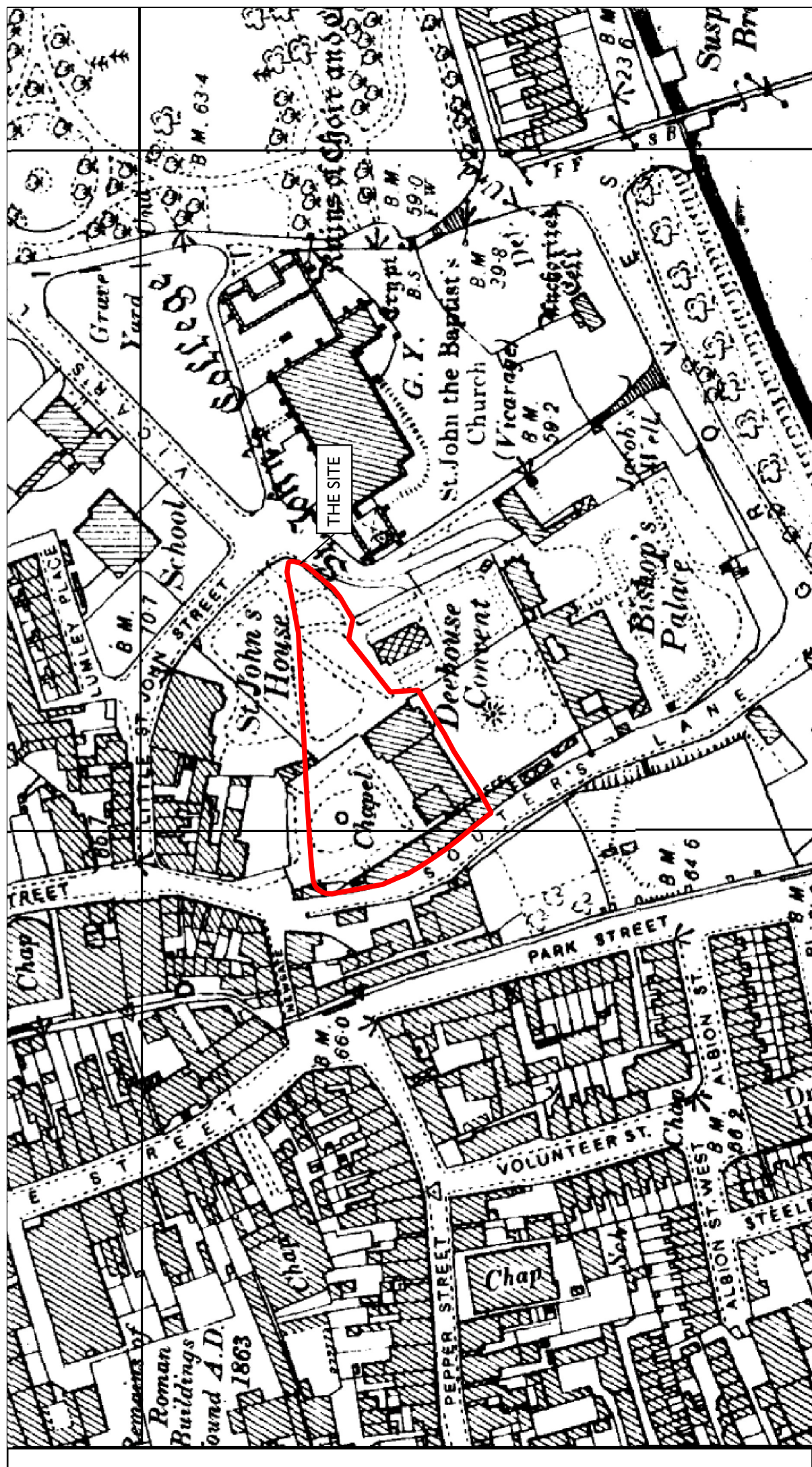
PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Ordnance Survey Sheet Chester XXXVIII surveyed 1874

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

FIGURE 20 // OS Map 1899



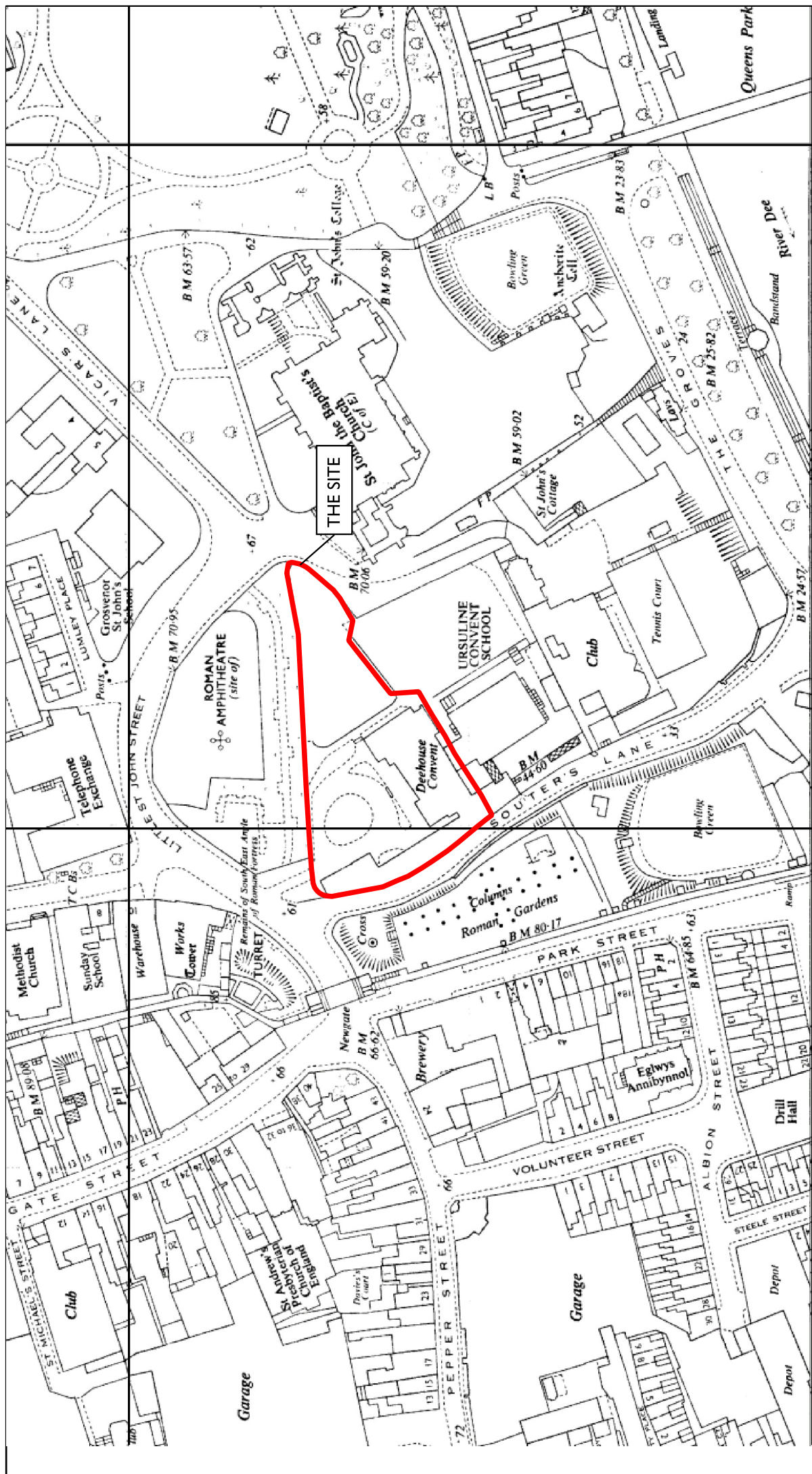
PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Ordnance Survey Sheet Chester XXXVIII surveyed 1899

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

FIGURE 21 // OS Map 1959



PROJECT // 1827C - Dee House

DESCRIPTION // Ordnance Survey Sheet Chester XXXVIII surveyed 1959

DOC REF: LP1827C-DBA-v1

L-P:ARCHÆOLOGY

LETTER FROM
ENGLISH HERITAGE
DATED 04/01/2010

APPENDIX I



ENGLISH HERITAGE

NORTH WEST REGION

E.H.

Rita Waters
Chief Executive
Chester Renaissance
Chester Visitor Centre
Vicar's Lane
Chester CHI IQX

Direct Dial: 0161 242 1407

4 January 2010

Dear Rita

Further to our recent meeting I thought it might be helpful to offer some advice from the English Heritage (EH) perspective on the potential for development to secure the conversion and re-use of the Dee House area and to provide some initial guidance on what in our view might be possible here. This will, we hope, provide you with some clarity when seeking a suitable development partner and provide a basis for an options appraisal to be carried out for the site.

I really welcome your initiative. For too long the poor condition of Dee House and the lack of action (whether to bring it back into use, or to seek to demolish it) has had a negative effect on the wider area. I am very pleased that action is now being taken to address this. As you know English Heritage has a firm view that we would like to see Dee House repaired and brought back into beneficial use, but at this stage the important point is you have started a process to test this out.

Looking first at the principles involved, the site of Dee House needs to be considered within its wider historic context to gain the fullest understanding possible of the area. The Roman Amphitheatre lies underneath and adjacent to Dee House, with the scheduled and Grade I Listed Church of St John's sited alongside, no doubt intended to symbolise the introduction of Christianity to an area associated with barbaric and pagan practices. Historic routes of considerable character link the area with the river. These would have been crucial for the transport of goods and materials as well as being used for the disposal of rubbish. Later civilizing development includes the ecclesiastical precinct, Dee House and the Grade II Grosvenor Park. The installation of the Kirby chapel and re-use of Dee House as a convent school in the later 19th century exerted a further religious impact on the area. The site retains the physical evidence of over two thousand years of history.

Important views are provided from the City Walls across the frontage of Dee House to St John's and overlooking the site of the Amphitheatre. This view is, however, currently partly obscured by the more recent building on the west side of Dee House. From Vicar's Lane, the east façade of Dee House makes a strong statement.



SUITES 3.3 AND 3.4 CANADA HOUSE 3 CHEPSTOW STREET MANCHESTER M1 5FW
Telephone 0161 242 1400 Facsimile 0161 242 1401
www.english-heritage.org.uk

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*Please note that English Heritage operates an access to information policy.
Correspondence or information which you send us may therefore become publicly available*



Continued 2

ENGLISH HERITAGE

There is also considerable archaeological interest in the brick retaining wall on the west side of Souter's Lane.

The historic environment assets in this area are of very high value. In our opinion, however, their value as a group within their wider setting is of even greater significance. In view of this, and the designations that apply, it is important to stress from the outset that:

- there is an over-riding need to protect and retain in situ the nationally important archaeological remains;
- new development in the area should aim to enhance the presentation and visitor experience of the existing historic features;
- any new build should be subservient to the historic buildings and structures and to respond positively to them and their setting.

Possibilities for enhancement of the presentation and experience of the area might include:

- opening up the view from the City across the front of Dee House to St John's, and
- providing public access (and perhaps also remote access through the use of cameras) to a view from a height of the Amphitheatre and activities taking place there.

Arising from all of the above, we would make the following more specific points:

1. **Archaeology.** From an archaeological perspective, the post-medieval and earlier remains in the area should be left undisturbed. However, we are of the view that the early modern archaeology could be preserved by record. This means that there is the possibility for development where it can be shown that the ground disturbance involved would not penetrate beyond modern and early modern levels. You may wish to commission archaeological evaluation of some areas of the site in order to establish the depth of these levels. This would provide a developer with information about the type of development and form of construction that might be possible.
2. **Dee House.** English Heritage is currently preparing a report on the significance of different aspects of Dee House, both internally and externally, and we expect this to be in a form we can circulate to you by the end of March 2010. The following very general points may, however, provide some useful guidance at this stage:
 - The plan form of the earlier part of Dee House (built c. 1730) is intact and of sufficient significance that it should be retained, together with the stairs and the remaining architectural detail on the ground and first floors. The Kirby chapel should also be retained. The original building was extended to the west shortly after its completion and this element also needs to be respected in any scheme of redevelopment

/Contd ...



- The envelope of the 1880s build should be retained but there is considerable scope for alteration within this.
 - The more recent north-south oriented building range to the west of Dee House is of lesser significance and need not be retained (subject to prior recording) although consideration of the impact on Souter's Lane would be needed (see further below).
3. **Extending Dee House.** Extension to the rear of Dee House is constrained by the court building. The coherent eastern elevation of the chapel that provides a strong view coming from Vicar's Lane (a point of arrival for many people to Chester) suggests that extension on this side would be difficult. We could, however, envisage some kind of lightweight modern viewing tower/platform adjacent to Dee House but set back here. Access to a viewing platform might alternatively (or in addition) be provided from within the building. More speculatively, if the Church were involved and the site extended to include St John's, a new structure within the old tower of St John's would have historical resonance and might provide a new focus for that site. It should be stressed, though, that we have not raised this last suggestion as yet with David Chesters or any other parties; nor have we looked in any detail at its feasibility.

Extension to the west of Dee House may have more potential and the removal of the one and two storey additions to the western edge of the site would be possible if this were to ensure greater benefit overall. The single storey brick building has little merit. While the two storey building (constructed in two phases) does contribute to the conservation area, it could be argued to have less significance than the rest of the site. To achieve a viable re-use of Dee House and the site as a whole, it should be possible to allow for the removal of these additions. Any elements of the site proposed for demolition would, however, need to satisfy the tests set out in PPG15 before demolition could take place.

4. **New-build design parameters.** In order to protect / enhance the character of the conservation area and the setting of the listed buildings and scheduled monuments, the following design parameters should be considered:
- We would welcome a contemporary design approach to any new build on the site. To ensure the new build did not challenge Dee House as the principal building on the site, we suggest that a subtle and understated architectural language be adopted.
 - The height of any new building should be no higher than the ridge of the roof of the existing additional building – this would allow the parapet of the original phase of Dee House to be seen above it from the city wall.
 - The foot print of any new building should be set back from the existing footprint to allow the whole of the recessed original front of Dee House to be viewed from the city wall.



Continued 4

ENGLISH HERITAGE

- Lift shafts and foundations would have to be designed in such a way (for example by rafting) that they ensured the preservation *in situ* of the earlier archaeology. Some parts of Dee House have, however, been cellared and, have removed at least some of the underlying archaeology, thus providing additional flexibility in terms of new build.
 - The existing building line / retaining wall to Souter's Lane should be retained to preserve the enclosed character of the lane and retain *in situ* the existing stone work to the retaining wall.
5. **Access & Circulation.** Any development proposal needs to consider wider master planning issues. At the broadest level the road system around the Amphitheatre is detrimental to the setting of the monuments and character of the area - although it is recognized that it is currently essential to traffic movement around the City. Changing the "feel" of the area so that it is more pedestrian than traffic friendly should however be achievable through traffic management and public realm works. Pedestrian and vehicular access through the gateway entrance to Dee House is extremely constrained. The removal of the buildings west of Dee House (or reduction of their footprint) could be beneficial in creating a larger space around the Amphitheatre and in front of Dee House. The possibility of providing vehicular access to Dee House (for servicing etc) via a side entrance on the east side, between Dee House and St John's could be considered. There may be potential within a wider master plan to provide a link across the Dee House frontage between the City and St John's/Grosvenor Park.

In order to better inform a development proposal we would advise that a clear statement of the significance of the archaeological, historical and architectural features should be prepared, based on the outcomes of the Chester Amphitheatre Project. This could then inform the preparation of an options appraisal. If it were possible to commission archaeological evaluation of the site at the same time, this could usefully inform the appraisal. Scheduled Monument Consent would be needed for the evaluation work.

The lead for English Heritage for the Amphitheatre/Dee House area is Jennie Stopford (0161 242 1453 or 07901 594105; email jennie.stopford@english-heritage.org.uk). Please do not hesitate to contact her or me if you have any queries or would like to discuss anything further.

With best wishes for 2010

Yours sincerely

Henry Owen-John
Planning & Development Regional Director

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

APPENDIX 2

11. Previous Archaeological Work

11.1. This section is presented in a chronological order. Early sections refer to the site of the Roman Amphitheatre rather than to Dee House; however, it should be noted that Dee House and the Roman Amphitheatre are synonymous in this report as the site is made up of both of these heritage assets. Refer to figure 5 for the location of archaeological investigations described in this section.

11.2. The first indication that an amphitheatre might have existed in Chester came in 1738, when part of a slate plaque was discovered in Fleshmonger's Lane, now Newgate Street, within 100m of the north east side of the amphitheatre. The relief, which is now in Saffron Walden, depicts a fight between a secutor and retiarius (Jackson 1983). The retiarius is notable in that he is left-handed (Wilmott 2007), and the relief may represent a real fight between men whose names were known in Chester. It may have been part of the ornament of the amphitheatre, or possibly part of a gladiator's tombstone.

11.3. *Discovery in 1929*: The amphitheatre building itself was discovered during the excavation of a heating chamber for a rear extension to the Dee House Ursuline convent school in 1929. W J Williams' (1929) recognition of the remains as those of an amphitheatre was a remarkable feat of interpretation given the fact that the existence of the building was unsuspected, and that only a small section of the buttressed wall was exposed.

11.3.1. Williams recognised the similarity of the curved and buttressed wall to that of the recently excavated amphitheatre at Caerleon (Wheeler and Wheeler 1928) and concluded that Chester's amphitheatre had been found. He further speculated that close to the end of the exposed section may have been a barrel vaulted entrance, and wondered whether the amphitheatre remains might not be those referred to by the 14th century Chester monk Ranulph Higden (Polychronicon, 1.48).

11.3.2. He also associated the building with the gladiator relief found in 1738, which he concluded might have been part of the ornamentation of the building.

11.3.3. Further trenches dug by P H Lawson, who assumed that the dimensions of the building would have been similar to those of Caerleon, confirmed the

identification. Lawson's small-scale trenches enabled an accurate assessment of the position and extent of the building to be made. Some of his drawings, including an attempt to work out the orientation of the long axis exist in the site archive. No report for this work was produced, and its results were incorporated in the account of the work of Newstead and Droop (1932).

11.4. Work of the Chester Excavations Committee 1930-39: The discovery of the amphitheatre did not happen a moment too soon for the long-term survival of the monument. In the same year, 1929, Chester Corporation had planned to replace the curving line of Little St John's Street with a straight road from the end of Vicar's Lane to a reconstructed Newgate, at the east end of Pepper Street. The curve of the street was caused by the presence of the amphitheatre around the northern side of which it ran. This topographical feature is clearly of great antiquity and is shown on the earliest reliable map of Chester made in 1610 by John Speed.

11.4.1. The boundary walls for the road had actually been built in 1929 (Thompson 1975, 130; Fig 10). As a result of the scheme, excavations in 1930-31 took place under the aegis of the Chester Excavations Committee, directed by Professors R Newstead and J P Droop. These works established the extent of the building and gave some idea of its plan and state of survival (Newstead and Droop 1932a). The main east entrance and one of the vomitoria were exposed and partially excavated. The works also revealed the south-east corner of the legionary fortress (Newstead and Droop 1932b; Fig 14).

11.4.2. During the years 1930-33 discussions took place between the Chester Archaeological Society, the local authority and the government concerning the road scheme (Thompson 1975, 130-133). The cheapest option was to take the road across the amphitheatre site, the more expensive to improve the curving Little St John's Street, putting the southern edge of the road closer to the amphitheatre walls. Opposition to the cheaper scheme was vocal, including such leading figures as the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments Sir Charles Peers, Mortimer Wheeler, R G Collingwood, Sir Cyril Fox, and by November 1932 the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. In April 1932 a national appeal to save the amphitheatre was launched by the Chester Archaeological Society. £5,000 was promised or subscribed.

11.4.3. In early 1933, the Ministry of Transport refused to allow any road construction across the site. In the following year the Chester Archaeological Society purchased St John's House, a large, eighteenth century town house which occupied the north-eastern part of the site, for the sum of £4,000, and also received a grant of £1,000 from the Pilgrim Trust. At the same time, the Corporation undertook to purchase all remaining properties required for the re-modelling of Little St John's Street. HM Office of Works then undertook to commence excavation on completion of the road works (JCAS 1936, 124). It was recognised that this would take time, and the Society leased St John's House to Cheshire County Council for three years from May 1935.

11.4.4. In 1934 further trial excavation was carried out by R Newstead at 19, St John's Street and in St John's House to determine the northern limits of the amphitheatre (JCAS 1936, 124). The existence of a pair of drawings made by the architect P H Lawson of Pepper Street showing a scheme for the presentation of the amphitheatre while retaining both St John's House and Dee House, strongly suggests that this work was undertaken ultimately to inform such a scheme.

11.4.5. The outbreak of war in 1939 ended any such ideas, and in September of that year three air raid shelters were dug on the site. These were located in Amphitheatre Gardens, the area defined by the flanking walls for the aborted road across the amphitheatre. The excavation of these shelters resulted in the destruction of a 'considerable portion of the northern flanking wall of the western entrance to the amphitheatre' (JCAS 1940, 164). This was the vomitorium which had been excavated by Newstead and Droop as their Site 5. The work seems to have taken place without notifying the Archaeological Society, which protested strongly to the Office of Works.

11.5. ***Excavation and presentation 1952-72:*** From the 1950s to the 1970s work was undertaken to 'fully' excavate and display the northern half of the amphitheatre. The work was directed by F Hugh Thompson, then Director of the Grosvenor Museum and later General Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Thompson's report on the work, which contains valuable background information, was published in 1975.

11.5.1. Some work seems to have taken place on the site in 1952, as finds so labelled exist in the archive. This work is otherwise unrecorded, and Matthews (2003) has suggested that limited work might have taken place during the establishment of the Amphitheatre Gardens on the line of the abandoned road. In 1957, a series of trial holes were excavated at the request of the Ministry of Works and the City Corporation to establish the line of the outermost amphitheatre wall in order to fix the line of the new Little St John's Street (Thompson 1996, 50). This road was constructed as close as possible to the amphitheatre without impinging on its actual fabric (the inner edge of the kerb lies only 260 mm outside the ends of the side buttresses to the amphitheatre entrances on the north side). It is important to note that virtually no other examination of the outer wall fabric was undertaken during this campaign, and Thompson's reconstruction of the positions of 'buttresses' on the outer wall in his later plans are, in fact, conjectural (Thompson 1975, 159). No effort was made to record archaeology on the line of the road during its construction. The following year St John's House was demolished as part of the general clearance of buildings that occupied the northern half of the amphitheatre (Thompson 1975, 131).

11.5.2. In 1960 excavation began in earnest, with the clearance of the cellar of St John's House and the formal excavation of the cavea or seating bank beneath the floor of this building. The work revealed the existence of timber beam-slots beneath the piled seating bank material, and this was the first indication of what Thompson interpreted as a timber precursor to the stone-built amphitheatre. The timber traces were christened the 'grillage' by Thompson in response to comments made by the contractors on site (Thompson 1996, 51). At the same time the excavation of the main north entrance of the amphitheatre, which lay adjacent to St John's House, was undertaken.

11.5.3. The excavation area was bounded on its south side by the boundary wall of the Dee House convent school. The floor of the arena lay some 4 m below the base of this wall. In order to allow the excavation of the arena it was necessary to construct a substantial and deep concrete retaining wall in order to retain the archaeology of the southern half of the amphitheatre, and of course Dee House

itself. The retaining wall was 82 m long, 1.8 m thick and 4.5 m high (Weaver 1975). A trench the width and depth of the intended wall was cut along the line of the Dee House boundary. The trench was shuttered and concrete poured. The brick boundary wall, 2.7m in height, was then rebuilt on top of the linear concrete slab. This trench effectively bisected the archaeology of the amphitheatre, with only a partial sectional record kept. The sections drawn at the western end of the retaining wall produced further evidence for the so-called 'grillage'. These informative sections were not included in Thompson's publication.

11.5.4. In 1961 trenching revealed the top of the arena wall (Thompson 1975, 132), and the mechanical removal of 'overburden' began. In 1965-66 the face of the arena wall was exposed in a series of trenches cut through the arena fill along the curve of the wall. Although baulks were left for recording, only two sections were drawn (Thompson 1975, 144; fig 5). At the same time a trench 1.22m wide was cut through the seating bank to expose the rear face of the arena wall. The butt ends of 'grillage' beams were recorded, but if there were any subtleties in the make-up of the seating bank in relation to any structural changes in the arena wall, this information was lost. Where the arena wall was leaning it was jacked back to the horizontal. To hold it in position against the trench to the rear of the arena wall was filled with concrete, which was tied into the original stonework with non-corroding metal ties (Weaver 1975, 238). This concrete was also carried around the backs of the walls of the main north and east entrances. Here too any relationship between the seating bank and the entrance structure was removed with virtually no record. By the end of 1966 the principal north and east entrances had been explored, the arena wall exposed and consolidated, the retaining wall installed and the St John's House cellar excavated. Figure 4 shows the areas actually excavated by Thompson. The plan is based upon an analysis undertaken on the original records by Keith Matthews. Fig XX is Thompson's published site plan which does not make clear which areas were excavated, and to what level excavation was undertaken. Except in the arena it does not appear that the natural bedrock was anywhere encountered.

11.5.5. The arena was largely excavated by the use of earthmoving machinery. A 'deliberate decision [was made] to remove mechanically all but the final 2 ft (0.61m) of this overburden' (Thompson 1975, 149). This removed in excess of 3.5 m depth of archaeological deposits across half of the arena area dating from the end of the Roman period to the present. In 1967 the lower levels of the arena fill were excavated by hand. In 1968 machinery was again used, this time on the seating bank, with the aim of exposing more of the timber 'grillage'.

11.5.6. 'Since a large scale investigation of the timber amphitheatre would necessarily involve the removal of a great quantity of overburden, even after the general reduction of levels carried out mechanically in 1963, it was concluded that machinery would again have to be employed. The method adopted was to strip large areas of the seating bank of the stone amphitheatre to a width of approximately 36 ft (10.96 m) from the rear face of the arena wall in order to reveal not only the timber grillage, but also the stone side-walls of minor entrances. By gradually planing off the overburden the Drott [tracked shovel] was intended to expose the timber features from the highest level to which they survived down to their lowest foundations' (Thompson 1975, 138-9).

11.5.7. Once the tops of timber uprights were exposed in plan, only two areas were then further excavated by hand, and these were Areas 68/3 and 68/4.

11.5.8. In 1970-72, the monument was further consolidated and opened as a public monument. The portions displayed were the deep areas of the arena and the east and west principal entrances. In the subsequent publication it was stated that:

'Although it was wished to display as much of the excavated remains as possible, some walls, for example the outer wall of the amphitheatre and the flank walls of the subsidiary entrances had been so reduced by robbing that it was impracticable to leave them open for display' (Weaver 1975, 239).

11.5.9. Thompson (1975, 149) had accepted that the widespread machining of the site would result in a 'loss of artifacts and possibly also of structures'. In later years he recognised the demerits of the method. He wrote:

'So if I have a conclusion looking back over the amphitheatre operation, it is perhaps that we might have been a little ruthless and ham-fisted in our approach to the digging out of vast quantities of soil' (Thompson 1996, 53).

11.5.10. Thompson's rapid publication of the excavation in the *Archaeologia* for 1975 was a landmark in the study of the amphitheatres of Roman Britain. In the same volume was the account of early excavations at Maumbury Rings, Dorchester, a henge monument which had been converted for use as an amphitheatre (Bradley 1975). Together, these reports were the first accounts of British amphitheatre excavations since Wheeler's report on Caerleon (Wheeler and Wheeler 1928). The conclusions derived from the work were therefore extremely influential. Thompson postulated the existence of two amphitheatres; the first, wholly timber built, was represented by the so-called grillage and was dated according to the phasing of the legionary fortress to the late 70s AD, while the second was composed of the excavated stone elements, was wholly stone built, and was dated by various means, archaeological and inferential, to c AD 100 (Thompson 1975, 182).

11.6. ***Dee House and Development, 1992-2000:*** The future of the amphitheatre is widely seen to be inextricably linked with that of Dee House, the Grade II listed building which occupies the southern half of the amphitheatre. The building was, as already noted, used as a convent school of the Ursuline order from 1925. In 1929 the construction of a new school wing to the south of the building led to the discovery of the outer wall of the amphitheatre by Williams. In 1976, following the opening of a new Catholic high school the Dee House School closed, and the buildings were acquired by Post Office Telephones (later British Telecom) and converted for use as a telephone exchange.

11.6.1. The demolition of Dee House in order to excavate and display the entirety of the Roman building has frequently been discussed within the last twenty years. Several different proposals have been drawn up for the monument, all involving some element of excavation and display, and other works have been carried out on parts of the site, all of which have required various degrees of archaeological evaluation.

11.6.2. In the mid-1980s a local entrepreneur, Mr Tony Barbet, proposed to purchase the site. Barbet planned to excavate the remainder of the amphitheatre and to reconstruct a portion of it. Consent was given for the scheme in 1990, including the demolition of Dee House, but the scheme failed due to financial problems, and planning consent lapsed in October 1995. Meanwhile in 1993, a planning application was submitted by British Telecom to Chester City Council for works at Dee House, including the demolition of former convent school buildings to the south to be replaced by new-build, the refurbishment of Dee House, the demolition or refurbishment of the chapel, and the clearance of outbuildings to the east of Souters Lane. This proposal required an archaeological evaluation which was undertaken by the University of Lancaster Archaeological Unit (Buxton 1993; Fig 24, 1-40). Forty trenches were recorded across the southern part of the site. The brief for the work required that excavation should cease when significant archaeology (defined as being earlier than the building of Dee House in 1730) was revealed. In practice, allowance was made for the excavation of earlier deposits at the City Archaeologist's request in twelve instances (Buxton 1993, 11). In broad terms the work showed that beneath the core of Dee House cellarage had destroyed virtually all of the archaeology while under the later accretions to the building preservation was somewhat better. Chester Archaeology undertook a second phase of evaluation with six additional trenches in 1994 (Cleary 1994; Fig 24, 41-46).

11.6.3. In 1995 British Telecom sold the site. Dee House and its immediate surroundings were purchased by Chester City Council while the 1930s buildings and associated land to the rear of Dee House was acquired by property developer David Maclean. Consent was granted for a new structure to replace the derelict school buildings. These were the buildings whose erection had first revealed the amphitheatre. Work on the new building, Trident House, which now houses a Civil Justice Centre began in 1999. It was designed to cause minimal damage to the buried remains through the reuse of existing pile foundations, and an archaeological watching brief was maintained on the construction work by Gifford and Partners (Garner 2005; Fig 24, 47-48).

11.6.4. From the onset of construction public interest in the monument was again heightened and a local interest group (the Chester Amphitheatre Trust) was formed to lobby local politicians. The trust's main aims were to halt progress of the new building and to encourage excavation of the remainder of the amphitheatre. In an echo of the controversy of the 1930s passions were roused, banners and placards around the city and district proclaimed 'Save our Amphitheatre', and the Lord Chancellor's office was drawn into an inquiry on the whole scheme. The inquiry found in favour of the work, and the building was completed in 2001. Dee House has remained unoccupied since its acquisition by the City Council. It is now owned by the successor local authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council.

11.7. **Research 2000-2003:** In a development separate from the Dee House controversy, though in part prompted by it, Keith Matthews of Chester Archaeology drafted a preliminary research framework for the site in which estimates of the surviving quantity of archaeology were attempted (Matthews 2000). In the same year, 2000, Matthews undertook an evaluation of the conserved area of the amphitheatre. Nine small trenches were excavated to establish whether any archaeological deposits survived on the exposed part of the site, and if so whether buried deposits or structures were deteriorating as a result of visitor activity (Matthews et al 2001).

11.7.1. This work clearly showed that the northern side of the monument had not been as totally excavated as had been believed. In the following three years further work was undertaken by Matthews, again principally on the northern half of the amphitheatre, this time to answer a series of specific academic questions raised in the Research Agenda (Matthews 2000; Fig 24, I -XIII). In particular the work was aimed at recovering information on the post-Roman history of the amphitheatre – an area virtually ignored by Thompson. Surviving Roman stratigraphy in the east entrance and on the seating banks was also examined and recorded (Matthews et al 2002, Matthews 2003).

11.7.2. The excavation was run as a community project, staffed by members of the Chester Archaeological Society, archaeology students from Chester College of Higher Education and West Cheshire College, and by other local interested volunteers, including members of the campaign group the Chester

Amphitheatre Trust. Matthews' work clearly demonstrated that a great deal of intact and valuable archaeology survived in the area previously explored by Thompson.

11.7.3. The work also cast great doubt on Thompson's interpretation. Matthews found convincing evidence that Thompson's so-called concentric wall was contemporary with the 'grillage'. Following Thompson's association of all stone elements of the building as a single construction, Matthews concluded that the 'grillage' was also part of a single phase amphitheatre, dismissing the timber amphitheatre entirely (Matthews 2001, Matthews et al 2002).

THE CHESTER AMPHITHEATRE PROJECT 2004 to 2008

11.8. **Background:** The Chester Amphitheatre project grew from the continuing controversy over the state of the amphitheatre and its environs, particularly the construction of Trident House and the condition of Dee House in the early part of the 21st century. In January 2001, English Heritage called for tenders for the production of a Conservation Plan for the site which was drawn up by Donald Insall Associates (2001). As part of this document a costings exercise for total excavation was undertaken by English Heritage (Wilmott 2001). During spring of 2002, discussions between EH and Chester City Council were held during which the future excavation of the Amphitheatre was considered and a brief for archaeological work was drawn up (Wilmott 2002). The Chester Amphitheatre Project was finally conceived in 2003 following representations made to the then Chairman of English Heritage, Sir Neil Cossons, and the Chief Executive Dr Simon Thurley. The Project was undertaken as a 50:50 funded, joint English Heritage/ Chester City Council project. It was a high priority in the policy of the City Council and was a designated English Heritage Beacon Project. The project had three basic components:

- An archaeological research framework
- A non-invasive survey of the amphitheatre and its environs
- Excavation within the amphitheatre area.

11.8.2. These components were detailed in a briefing paper to a Chester Amphitheatre Steering Group on October 17th 2003.

11.8.3. One of the key elements of the project was the formulation of a Research Framework for the amphitheatre the production of which was funded through the English Heritage Archaeology Commissions Programme. The Insall Conservation Plan (2001, 107) had noted that

11.8.4. 'Any future archaeological investigation or excavation proposal must be based on a research agenda which is designed to reveal a full multi period understanding of the site or, if more limited, in scope, must not result in the destruction of material that could compromise that aim.'

11.8.5. The Framework was produced by Oxford Archaeology (Wain 2003), and summarised and built upon earlier work towards this end, particularly by Keith Matthews (2000).

11.8.6. Although the site of the Roman amphitheatre was to be at the heart of the work, the project was to be a great deal broader than the examination of a single structure in a single period. The existence of the amphitheatre had a profound impact on the development of this part of Chester in later centuries, and the broader remit of the project was to understand as far as possible the whole history of a Study Area extending spatially between Grosvenor Park to the east and the City Walls to the west, and between the amphitheatre to the north and the river Dee to the south, and chronologically from prehistory to the present. Based upon this understanding it would be possible to formulate options for the preservation and presentation of the whole area based upon a thorough knowledge of its formation through time.

11.9. ***Non-invasive survey:*** In order to examine the post-Roman landscape history of the Study Area a whole range of non-invasive techniques were deployed. Following the approval of a Project Design for this work (Ainsworth and Wilmott 2004), it commenced in early 2004 under the management of Stewart Ainsworth, Senior Investigator at English Heritage. The work included large scale topographic and analytical landscape survey, ground-based photogrammetric survey and laser scanning, architectural survey encompassing all historic buildings in the area. Ground-based and aerial photographic surveys were also conducted. The majority of these techniques provided information on the development of the post-amphitheatre

landscape of the Study Area.

11.9.1. Non-invasive survey of buried archaeology in the form of geophysical survey was also undertaken. In 1992 GSB Surveys of Bradford carried out Ground Penetrating Radar survey of most open spaces within the overall study area. Over the amphitheatre itself the results showed that archaeological survival was patchy or intermittent. The survey did, however suggest that of the two northern quadrants of the structure it was the north western quadrant that showed most potential for surviving intact archaeology, and this result guided the decision on excavation areas.

11.10. **Excavation:** Options for excavation were derived from a thorough analysis of the non-invasive work, and of the past and recent excavations. One of the first conclusions of this review was that it would not be appropriate to undertake any further small scale evaluation. So many small interventions had been made over the years, particularly in connection with successive ideas on the site's future that the area was pock-marked with unconnected evaluation trenches and it was felt that there was a danger of losing archaeological legibility over some parts of the site. Additionally these works, particularly those of Keith Matthews, had hinted at interpretative and preservation issues that could only be resolved through large-scale excavation. The work was to be directed by Tony Wilmott, Senior Archaeologist at English Heritage and a co-director from Chester City Council. The departure of Keith Matthews to take up another job led to the recruitment to this position of Dan Garner in Spring 2004. Excavation was originally planned to take place over two field seasons in 2004 and 2005. Each season a core professional fieldwork staff of 2 Site Supervisors, 8 Site Assistants, a Finds Supervisor and Assistant, and an Environmental Supervisor and Assistant were recruited. The permanent specialist staff of Chester archaeology also provided a full-time on site presence. The project was undertaken in partnership with the Universities of Liverpool and Chester, and training was provided to archaeological students from these two institutions. At any one time there were 8 students on 3-4 week training rotations. A programme of volunteer involvement was also an important part of the project.

11.10.1. The archaeological objectives of the work were laid out in successive project designs (Wilmott 2004, 2005). They were:

- ◆ 1. To establish the scope and extent of the Thompson excavations, and the state of survival of the archaeology of the northern side of the amphitheatre.
- ◆ 2. To establish the post-Roman uses of the northern half of the amphitheatre.
- ◆ 3. To establish the survival of post-Roman deposits on the southern side of the amphitheatre.
- ◆ 4. To establish the date and sequence of the filling of the arena.
- ◆ 5. To establish the immediate post-Roman use of the southern side of the amphitheatre.
- ◆ 6. To explore the connection between the amphitheatre and St John's church.
- ◆ 7. To enhance knowledge on the construction of the stone-built amphitheatre.
- ◆ 8. To reassess the evidence for a timber amphitheatre phase, with particular regard to the possibility that this evidence relates to internal structures within the stone-built amphitheatre, and not to a separate and earlier phase.
- ◆ 9. To establish the pre-amphitheatre uses of the site.
- ◆ 10. To retrieve material culture and ecofacts which could further our understanding of the history of the amphitheatre and its surrounding landscape within the Study Area through time.

11.10.2. To this end it was decided to excavate three areas:

11.10.3. Area A (Plate 11) was designed to address objectives 1, 2, 7, 8, 9 and 10. It was located in the north-western quadrant of the amphitheatre taking in the area between the north entrance and the westernmost vomitorium on the north side; an area measuring 34 x 20m. The intention here was to empty the trenches previously excavated by Thompson, and to totally excavate, down to natural the remaining archaeology within the area.

11.10.4. Area B (Plate 10) was to examine objectives 3, 5, 6 and 10. It coincided approximately with the area between the eastern entrance and the first vomitorium in this quadrant; an area of 20 x 15m (it was extended westwards in an area 10 m x 9 m during the second season). Given the specific objectives for this area the post-Roman archaeology only was excavated to the level of surviving, intact Roman stratification and structure. In practice the Roman structures were so badly preserved and so intensively robbed that the excavation of the robber trenches and other intrusive features fortuitously provided much additional evidence concerning the Roman structure and phasing.

11.10.5. Area C (Plate 12), designed to address objectives 3, 4, 5, and 10 was excavated to the level of the arena floor. For safety and archaeological legibility, because of the 4 m depth of archaeological deposits to be explored, the area measured 9 m x 10 m at the top, and was gradually stepped down to an area half this size.

11.10.6. At the end of each season the site was covered in terram geotextile, and the fragile remains sandbagged in order to protect the archaeology from adverse winter weather. In 2006, pending a decision on the future of the excavated area the City Council decided to undertake a third excavation season, which was directed by Dan Garner. This fortunate addition to the original programme resulted in the recovery of important and well preserved prehistoric archaeology. At the end of this season the site was again winter protected. In the absence of a clear way forward on the display of the excavated remains the archaeology was protected with geotextile and layers of sand before being back-filled with archaeologically neutral material in March 2008.

11.11. ***Public access, popular publication and the Amphitheatre Conference:*** In addition to the pursuit of the archaeology, the project had a broader brief, to engage the public and to undertake educational and training activities. The excavation was fenced using wire Heras fencing, and passing public were encouraged to talk to the site staff. Early discussions took place on the provision of a viewing platform. It was the idea of David Webb, Facilities Manager at English Heritage, that the concrete retaining wall built in the 1960s should be topped by a formal walkway from which



Plate 10: Chester Amphitheatre Project Area B during excavation in 2005. Looking west.



Plate 11: Chester Amphitheatre Project Area A during excavation in 2005. Looking north.



Plate 12: Chester Amphitheatre Project Area C during excavation in 2005. Looking east.



Plate 13: A 16th century owl jug from the Chester Amphitheatre Project Area C .

all excavation areas could be observed (the high brick wall on top of the concrete was demolished in early 2004 in preparation for the project). This was successful and remains a feature of the current layout of the site.

11.11.1. Throughout the excavation a web site was constructed and regularly updated, newsletters available free on site were produced, and signage was also regularly updated. In addition an Outreach Officer was appointed to carry out tours at intervals through the day. A TV documentary on the first season of work was produced by BBC Timewatch, and the co-directors produced a weekly update on the work in diary format in the Chester Chronicle. During the first season an artist in residence, Julia Midgely, recorded the work in a diary and a series of impressive 'documentary drawings'. This work was published (Midgely 2006), and Julia's work was displayed in an exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum from June-September 2005. Overlapping with this was another exhibition entitled 'To be killed with iron: the world of the Roman gladiator', which was curated by Dan Robinson at the Museum and ran from July to August 2005. A booklet, Chester Amphitheatre: from gladiators to gardens (Ainsworth and Wilmott 2005) summarised the ongoing excavation and looked at the broader history of the study area through time. English Heritage (2006) devoted a full issue of its Research News to aspects of the project. Other interim reports have also been published (Wilmott, Garner and Ainsworth 2006; Wilmott and Garner 2009)

11.11.2. Beyond doubt, however, the most successful activity organised through the project was the major international conference 'Roman Amphitheatres and Spectacula: a 21st Century Perspective', held at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester on the weekend of 16th-18th February 2007. This event attracted contributors from the UK, Ireland, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Spain, the USA, Canada and Brazil. When the collected papers were published (Wilmott 2009) additional articles were included by colleagues in the field from Croatia and Bulgaria. The plenary public lecture entitled 'Arena of Conflict: facts, myths and speculation' about gladiatorial combat in ancient Rome was presented by the Harvard Professor of Latin, Prof Kathleen Coleman the evening before the conference. Since this event the co-directors have spoken about the

amphitheatre at further conferences, notably in Carnuntum, Austria and Augst, Switzerland and at the International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies at Leon, Spain. There is no doubt that the Chester amphitheatre is now well known by the international community of amphitheatre and Roman military scholars.

11.12. *Post excavation assessment and analysis 2007 to present:* It was established at an early point in the initiation of the project that the process and costs of the assessment phase would be separate from and additional to the funds provided for fieldwork. This meant that the completion of fieldwork and the completion of the site archive informed the preparation of a Project Design for Assessment (Wilmott 2007b). This allowed the resources needed for Assessment to be accurately identified, and thus was a tool to define the way in which the 50:50 principle of funding for the work should be implemented.

11.12.1.The assessment of all categories of evidence from the excavation was begun in 2007. In 2009 local government reorganisation resulted in the abolition of Chester City Council, and the assumption of its duties, including the responsibility for the completion of the amphitheatre project, by the new Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC).

11.12.2.The form of publication for the project was the subject of extensive discussion between the funding parties before the programme of assessment work on the excavated material was formulated. A particular issue was the question of whether to publish as a single large volume or as two smaller thematic volumes. For good academic and pragmatic reasons it was decided that, though deriving from a single project, the archaeology of the site lends itself to a two volume publication. The decision to proceed in this way was made and agreed between Chester City Council (now CWAC) and English Heritage to proceed with a two volume publication.

11.12.3.The first volume will deal with the Prehistoric landscape discovered beneath the amphitheatre, and with the Roman amphitheatre from its inception through to its re-use in the post Roman period. This volume will include all pre-Roman, Roman, and immediate post-Roman, stratigraphy, structural

evidence, artefactual and ecofactual material and the core narrative will be derived from the excavated evidence. The second volume will deal with the periods from the c 8th century robbing of the amphitheatre to the present. It will focus on the development of the area of Chester around the amphitheatre and St Johns Church. The volume will include all data derived from non-invasive survey, amplified and illuminated by the excavated stratigraphic, artefactual and ecofactual material. The core narrative for Volume 2 will be derived principally from the landscape history provided by the non-invasive survey.

11.12.4. The progress of the work of assessment was slowed by reorganisations in both funding bodies, but in April 2013 an Assessment document for Volume 1 (Wilmott 2013a) was produced and submitted together with an Updated Project Design which identified the level of resource needed to complete the volume, and laid out a timetable for the analytical and production work. At the time of writing the parallel assessment for Volume 2 is nearing completion.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

APPENDIX 3

12. Archaeological and Historical background

TIMESCALES USED IN THIS REPORT:

PERIOD	FROM	TO
PREHISTORIC		
PALAEOLITHIC	450,000	9,000 BC
MESOLITHIC	9000	4,000 BC
NEOLITHIC	4,000	2,500 BC
BRONZE AGE	2500	600 BC
IRON AGE	600	43 AD
HISTORIC		
ROMAN	43	410 AD
EARLY MEDIEVAL	410	1066 AD
MEDIEVAL	1066	1485 AD
POST MEDIEVAL	1485	1901 AD
MODERN	1901	PRESENT

Table 4- Timescales used in this report

12.1. This section provides a chronological summary of the archaeological phases so far identified within the environs of Dee House and the Roman amphitheatre. These phases have been broken down into a series of Themes for more easy reference in later sections of the report.

12.2. The locations of previous archaeological investigations are shown in Figure 5. Data regarding the levels at which Roman and significant later archaeology are known to survive on the site are displayed as a series of plans and cross-sections in figures 6 to 16.

12.3. GEOLOGY

12.3.1. The city of Chester occupies a ridge of the Permo-Triassic sandstone known as the Chester Pebble Beds, which protrudes through thick glacial drift deposits. The ridge runs from Heronbridge in the south, through Handbridge, to the site of the Roman legionary fortress and subsequent walled city (Hebblethwaite 1987, 4; Mason 1976). The river Dee reaches Chester from the

south, bending sharply westwards to cut through the ridge between Chester to the north and Handbridge on the southern bank. The legionary fortress and its associated amphitheatre occupy the top of the ridge to the north of the river. From the narrow gorge through the ridge the river originally swung northwards along the western foot of the ridge into a broad estuary, the original banks of which are today marked by the line of the medieval city wall to the east and Curzon Park to the west. The area at the head of the estuary would have provided a secure anchorage in Roman times. The dynamic processes of sea-level change and silting has radically altered the river, and since the fourth century the flat alluvial plain known as the Roodee (which is today occupied by Chester racecourse) has formed (for the most recent assessment of the development of the river see Ward 2012, 260-3).

12.3.2. The sandstone ridge is nowhere more than 1km in width, and glacial till lies against its eastern flanks. Evaluation work to the south of the amphitheatre (Buxton 1993, 165) showed natural deposits of horizontally bedded, clean, brownish yellow sand. These sloped sharply towards the river. Though the excavator suggested that artificial terracing had taken place in the past, such a conclusion should be treated with caution due to the existence of a series of natural river terraces of late Pleistocene date cut into this material (Earp and Taylor 1986, 80), and it is more likely that this observation is of a natural river terrace of late Pleistocene date at around the 16.5-17m contour.

12.3.3. The Pebble Bed formation comprises medium- to coarse-grained reddish brown sandstone, incorporating characteristic rounded pebbles. In its well-cemented form it is durable enough to have been used as building stone (Earp and Taylor 1986, 16-18, 86). Stone quarries in the Dee gorge below the amphitheatre were worked in the medieval period, but were also worked to obtain stone for Roman construction (Strahan 1882, 3-9). This is the likely source for all stone used in the construction of the amphitheatre and later structures in the vicinity.

12.3.4. Another geological resource utilised at the amphitheatre should be mentioned. A fine yellow sand appears to have been imported in quantity for use in the arena. The origin of this material is not known, but it differs from the deposits

noted in the river bank exposures. In the Chester area glacial sand appears on the surface where it is not capped by overlying till or in deep valleys where exposures occur in the edges. This material may therefore have come from surface exposures such as those at Upton and Waverton (Earp and Taylor 1986).

12.3.5. Roman Chester was sited at the highest navigable point of the river Dee, which was also its lowest fordable crossing point. The Roman bridge from Chester to Handbridge joined the two outcrops of the Pebble Beds through which the river cut. The fortress occupied the top of the south-facing slope towards the river. This position emphasises the importance of the river and estuary in the planning of the Roman installation, as the highest point on the ridge lies some 30m north of the north gate of the fortress.

12.4. Theme 1: Early Prehistory

Mesolithic:

12.4.1. The study area has produced evidence of human activity from the early Mesolithic period onwards. The Mesolithic spans a large time zone between the end of the last glacial period c.9000 BC and the beginnings of farming in Britain c.4000 BC. It is generally thought that people of this period lived a 'hunter-gatherer' existence being very mobile in the landscape; probably moving from one temporary camp to the next on a seasonal basis within an established territory that could have had a range of up to 50km. As such, little evidence usually survives in the archaeological record for this period and Mesolithic sites are particularly rare in the vicinity of Chester or even within Cheshire as a whole; although from what is known the sandstone ridge upon which Chester sits does appear to be a focus for settlement during this period (Hodgson and Brennard 2006). The Dee House site itself would certainly appear favourable for occupation; being located on a promontory close to and overlooking the River Dee, it would have provided an ideal location in terms of transport/communication routes and resource abundance.

12.4.2. The evidence from the study area mainly comes from the Chester Amphitheatre Project excavations undertaken on parts of the site between

2004-2006 which produced a total of 161 worked stone artefacts. Most of the material was recovered from early cultivation soils dating to the later Iron Age which had been preserved beneath the later Roman amphitheatre.

Neolithic/Early Bronze Age

12.4.3. Evidence for early farming in Britain is thought to begin c.4000 BC when settlement patterns appear to move from a nomadic existence to one which is more fixed within the landscape. This period is known as the Neolithic and is characterised by woodland clearance, the erection of permanent buildings (long-houses), the domestication of livestock and the growing of crops (cereals). The Neolithic also marks the start of monument building in Britain in the form of large ritual and ceremonial monuments such as long barrows (burial mounds).

12.4.4. As with the earlier Mesolithic period evidence for the Neolithic in the Chester area is very rare and largely restricted to the finding of stone artefacts which are diagnostically Neolithic in date. Perhaps one of the most unusual of these finds is a jadeite axehead, found during excavations in Hunter Street in 1914; which was made of rock quarried in the Alpine valleys above Turin and Genoa and is among the earliest axeheads to reach Britain. It is believed that most of the jadeite axeheads found in Britain and Ireland were brought here c.4000 BC by small groups of pioneering farmers from northern France (Royles E & Sheridan A, 2009, Project Jade in The Past Uncovered Feb 2009 pp2 Dunn G (ed)).

12.4.5. The evidence from the study area mainly comes from the Chester Amphitheatre Project excavations undertaken on parts of the site between 2004-2006. Amongst the 161 worked stone artefacts mentioned in the Mesolithic section (above) a few large flakes and a seemingly relatively high proportion of retouched pieces were thought to date to the later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age period. Most of the material was recovered from early cultivation soils dating to the later Iron Age which had been preserved beneath the Roman amphitheatre.

12.4.6. The most notable artefact belonging to this group is a large and finely made

oblique transverse arrowhead, a type diagnostic of Later Neolithic industries and often associated with Clacton and Durrington Walls styles of Grooved Ware pottery (Clark 1935, type I; Green 1980). Its presence at the Dee House site is of interest as these are not common implements nationally and none have been previously recorded in the Chester area. Other retouched implements of a similar date within the assemblage include a non-prismatic blade and a scraper which is a 'horseshoe' type (Bishop, B, 2014).

12.5.Theme 2: Later Prehistory

12.5.1.The Iron Age period is poorly represented in the Chester area with previous finds being restricted to traces of pre-Roman cultivation soils beneath the Roman fortress ramparts and one or two finds of Iron Age pottery (known as Cheshire Stony VCP). The Chester Amphitheatre Project excavations undertaken on parts of the site between 2004-2006 identified several phases of activity preserved beneath the Roman amphitheatre seating banks which can be dated to the Middle and Late Iron Age periods. This represents the most convincing evidence for Iron Age occupation in Chester recovered to date.

Middle Iron Age

12.5.2.This period was represented by evidence for a single round house, with an associated 4-post structure. The four-post structure had two phases of construction which seem to have been separated by a fire. Large quantities of charred cereal were recovered from the 4-post structure which has led to its interpretation as a grain store. Sixteen radiocarbon measurements were obtained on samples from the site, all but one of which came from contexts associated with the four-post structure. It is clear from these results that the structural and agricultural activity can be dated broadly to the period 400-200 Cal BC.

12.5.3.Amongst the artefacts recovered from this occupation were 72 sherds from Cheshire salt-drying and transportation containers that are also known as Stony VCP or Cheshire briquetage (Morris 1985, 352-70, figs. 7-10, tables 2-5; 1994, 384-6, fig. 4A). The presence of salt containers at the site during the later Iron Age would lend support to the suggestion of a typical settlement at this location, and one which belonged to a wide network of trading

communities at the time. There was also a broken saddle-quern stone from one of the postholes of the four-post structure and an iron spear head (only the second such object to have been found in Cheshire).

Late Iron Age

12.5.4. The late Iron Age evidence from the Dee House site took the form of low earthworks which had survived beneath the amphitheatre seating bank in the top of the middle Iron Age cultivation soil. These earthworks had the appearance of parallel lines of ridge and furrow which are likely to be associated with a small field. Narrow ridge and furrow ranging from 0.7 m to 1.5 m between ridges and dating to the later Iron Age and into the Romano-British period is known as cord-rig (Halliday 1987, 1993, 2001; Topping 1989a, b). It has generally been identified in the southern Scottish uplands and into Northumberland where the lack of later land disturbance, particularly by medieval ploughing (Topping 1989b, 163) or the deposition of peat over ridged landscapes (Halliday 2001, 12) has allowed its survival. The Chester amphitheatre find appears to be the first record of cord-rig in Britain south of the main area of survival in Northumberland.

12.6. Theme 3: The Early Roman Amphitheatre

12.6.1. Chester was an important strategic location for the northward and westward expansion of Roman arms under the Flavian governors. It cut off any communication between the Brigantes in the north of England and the north Welsh tribes, notably the Ordovices. The site itself was perfect as it combined a major military base with an excellent harbour. Its position at the highest navigable point of the river, where the Dee opened up into a secluded anchorage made it an ideal base for combined army and naval operations both into Brigantia and Ordovician territory. The rapid narrowing of the river at this point also enabled the river to be bridged for easy land access into north Wales.

12.6.2. Conventional wisdom would hold that the fortress was founded in the 70s by Legion II Adiutrix, who formed its first garrison, and this view is held by Malone (2006, 46-7). The new fortress of Deva was built on a sloping site on the sandstone ridge from where it could command the Dee bridge, and where

an efficient water supply and drainage system could be installed (Mason 2012, 48). The primary defences consisted of an earthen rampart revetted with laid turves and timber strapping. Timber angle- and interval towers were provided and the gates were also of timber construction. The primary principia and early barracks were timber built, utilising a post-in –trench construction method (Mason 2012, 65-68). The main baths and horrea were built in stone, however, as were a group of buildings in the centre of the fortress.

12.6.3. It is now thought that the first amphitheatre was built within the environs of Dee House during the original founding of the fortress. The structure would have been relatively simple with a stone built outer wall (previously labelled as the concentric wall) which would also have served as a retaining wall for an earthen seating bank set around a relatively shallow arena. The early amphitheatre was only served by a northern and southern entrance which would have provided the only access to both the arena and seating banks. The estimated seating capacity was approximately 5-6000 people; which roughly equated to the size of the resident legion plus support staff.

12.7. Theme 4: The Renovation of the Early Roman Amphitheatre

12.7.1. The fortress probably became the base for legion XX Valeria Victrix after the retreat from Agricola's Scotland in AD 86-87. This appears to coincide with the rebuilding of several structures in timber, and a programme of rebuilding in stone for most buildings. The major task of rebuilding the fortress defences in stone appears to have begun before the end of the first century (Mason 2000, 86-7; Le Quesne 1999 144-5). It is uncertain to what extent the stone defensive circuit was completed. It is possible that it was not finished until the early third century, although Mason (2012, 138-41) considers it likely that the circuit was completed, possibly as early as the reign of Trajan, and invokes a Trajanic inscription (RIB 464) as a possible commemoration of the completion of the work. The quality of these defences, built in massive opus quadratum with a chamfered plinth at the base and an ornate cornice at rampart walk level marks them out as highly unusual. This period also seems to mark the initiation of the extramural canabae on the western side of the fortress (Ward et al 2012, 263). While knowledge of the situation to the east of the fortress is

sparse indications are that extramural settlement began here at the same time (Carrington 2012, 310).

12.7.2. It appears that at this time a suite of modifications were made to the first amphitheatre. Most significant of these modifications was the operation of terracing the earlier seating bank in order to erect a timber seating stage. The base of this timber stage appears to have been anchored beneath material removed from the arena in order to lower the height of the arena floor at the same time. The reason for replacing the earthen seating bank with a timber stage is not entirely clear but it may have increased the height of the seating rake and served to formalise the seating tiers as would have befitted the rank and status of the spectators. At the same time as the timber stage was erected external stone stair cases were added to the exterior of the outer wall in order to provide alternative access to the seating areas (besides the main north and south entrances). It is likely that the stone-built chamber adjoining the north entrance was also added during these modifications and was probably intended to serve as a carcer (wild beast pen) associated with entertainments within the arena.

12.7.3. Uniquely at Chester, deposits and structures associated with the use of the first amphitheatre have survived against the external side of the outer amphitheatre wall. Within these deposits were artefacts and ecofacts associated with the operation of the building such as: miniature bowls decorated with scenes of gladiatorial combat that were possible souvenirs; or fast food represented by animal bones. These items may have been sold from temporary timber stalls set up around the outside of the amphitheatre wall. Adjacent to the western side of the north entrance there was also evidence for a small stone structure which had been decorated internally with painted wall plaster and may have once been a small shrine (perhaps the original location for an altar to Nemesis).

12.8. Theme 5: The second century hiatus

12.8.1. There is a great deal of evidence to demonstrate that for most of the first half of the second century the vast majority of the legionary personnel was not present at Chester (Strickland 1999). Detachments of the legion are attested in major construction projects and in other theatres of operation. The clearest

example of this is the legion's participation together with the other two legions then in Britain, in the construction of Hadrian's Wall from AD 122 onwards (Breeze and Dobson 2000, 66-83; Malone 2006 221-34). At least part of the legion was still in the north between 128 and 138 where it was responsible for the construction of the Cumberland coastal fort at Moresby (Breeze 2006, 411).

12.8.2. During the following reign, that of Antoninus Pius, the British legions were responsible for the construction of the Antonine Wall between c 142 and 144. The clear implication is that half the legion were on other duties. On the abandonment of the Antonine Wall c161, soldiers of the legion were involved in the re-commissioning of Hadrian's Wall and construction works in the Pennine forts as part of the development of military deployment in northern Britain following the withdrawal from Antonine Scotland. There is no firm evidence for large scale reconstruction and re-occupation in the Chester fortress until the early years of the third century. Epigraphic evidence shows that the legion had detachments at Corbridge, Newstead and Carlisle in the 160s. For much of the troubled late second century the legion appears to have been deployed in the north, finally participating in Clodius Albinus' disastrous expedition to claim the purple which resulted in his defeat by Septimius Severus at Lugdunum in 198 (Malone 2006, 64).

12.9. Theme 6: Third century recommissioning

12.9.1. The British legions were returned to the Province by Severus, but the twentieth does not appear to have returned immediately to Chester. It is probable that the legion took a very active role in the campaigns into Scotland led by Severus from 208 until his death in 211 at York (Malone 2006, 65). It was only after these campaigns that the Chester fortress underwent a thorough recommissioning. This is attested by the widespread use of stamped ceramic building material giving the legion the cognomen Anto[niniana], which may be translated as 'Caracalla's own' (Mason 2012, 175).

12.9.2. At Chester it is also clear that the refurbishment process was underway around the time of Severus' death, but continued for several decades, with coins of Severus Alexander (222-35) being found in building foundations, including

the footings of the western gable of the principia cross-hall (Mason 2012, 175). The fortress was virtually completely rebuilt. Buildings were renewed or repaired, and plots that had remained open since the abandonment of the Flavian structural phase were now built upon. The fortress was equipped 'with a full complement of buildings for the first time in its history' (Mason 2012, 175).

12.9.3. The evidence suggests that the amphitheatre at Chester was largely rebuilt at this time (if not the later 2nd century). In structural terms a new outer wall was added to the amphitheatre which increased the depth of the seating bank by nearly 2m and effectively doubled the seating capacity of the earlier structure. In tandem with this the north (and probably the south) entrance were rebuilt on a slightly different alignment and a new eastern entrance was added. The new east entrance was furnished with additional flanking walls and it has been suggested that this was to accommodate a tribunal (a kind of royal box) for high ranking officials. Whilst an opposing western entrance has been postulated on many of the reconstructed plans of the amphitheatre the presence of this entrance has not yet been demonstrated through excavation. Beyond the external face of the new outer wall was evidence for a succession of 5 or 6 metalled road surfaces which did not show any of the signs of piecemeal activities that took place around the first amphitheatre.

12.9.4. In addition to the main entrances, eight minor entrances (vomitoria) were added to house vaulted stairways leading to the seating bank areas to cater for the increased numbers of spectators the building could now accommodate. The outer wall was furnished with half-round engaged columns to create the impression of a monumental building reminiscent of the Colosseum in Rome. It would appear that much of the arena wall was either built or modified at the same time as the main entrances were reconstructed. The small chamber or carcer to the west of the north entrance must still have been in use at this time as an entrance to it from the arena was incorporated in to the arena wall. There is a suggestion that the function of the chamber may have changed to a shrine (Nemeseum) during this period with an alter to the goddess Nemesis being placed within. Across the centre of the arena on a north-south were a series of

evenly spaced large stone blocks with iron fittings in the centre set with lead plugs; possibly used to secure animal or human victims in the arena.

12.9.5. The scale and architectural complexity of this second amphitheatre marks it out as the most elaborate example so far found in Roman Britain (Wilmott, Garner & Ainsworth, 2006).

12.10. Theme 7: The fourth century and later

12.10.1. Despite the legion's absence from the epigraphic record, and also from the *Notitia Dignitatum* (which records no military units in Wales either) it is certain from the archaeological evidence that the fortress at Chester continued in occupation during the fourth century. It may be that the legion was no longer the garrison, that it was divided, or that it changed its name during the various upheavals of the fourth century (Malone 2006, 71). The evidence for continued occupation and building work at Chester is summarised by Mason (2012, 231-4). He argues that the garrison, however constituted and however depleted nevertheless remained until at least the 390s, and it must remain possible that there was a presence beyond the end of the fourth century. It seems at least possible that the garrison at Chester remained because of the strategic coastal location of the fortress.

12.10.2. Within the amphitheatre at Chester evidence for the accumulation of rubbish and building debris in the main entrances and over the arena floor marks the end of the buildings use as an amphitheatre (in the classical sense). A dispersed coin hoard found above the arena floor during excavations by Newstead and Droop in the 1930's strongly suggests that this process of dis-use and abandonment happened some time after c.273; with Matthews suggesting a date between c.290-350. Matthews has argued for a late use of the amphitheatre arena for the execution of Christians or senior officers of the legion after supporting the failed regime of the usurper Carausius (Matthews, 2003).

12.11. Theme 8: The Sub-Roman Period

12.11.1. After the abandonment of the Roman fortress in the late 4th century it is likely that a declining population continued to live within the defences, which

would have provided security against raiders from across the Irish Sea. For the next 200 years there is only slight evidence as to what was happening in Chester; however, there is a possibility that Chester had become a place of religious importance in the late Roman period and the seat of a bishopric. Chester's re-emergence in to recorded history is marked by a synod of the British church held in 'Urbs Legionis' (the city of the legions) in 601 and presided over by Abbot Dinoot (head of the monastery at Bangor-on-Dee) (Mason, 2007).

12.11.2. At the amphitheatre (in the centre of the arena) there was evidence for a long and complex stratigraphic sequence of pits and postholes representing at least one rectangular building. This activity broadly spanned a period between the end of the Roman use of the amphitheatre and the 11th century; but the possibility that this represents sub-Roman occupation within the sheltering walls of the amphitheatre is compelling. To add substance to the theory there is evidence that the main east entrance was walled-up and this might indicate that the amphitheatre was made defensible as a fort for occupation or refuge. Evidence for similar reuse has been found at the Cirencester amphitheatre as well as at many continental amphitheatres such as Trier, Germany.

12.12. Theme 9: The founding of St John's church and the Anglo-Saxon burh

12.12.1. Medieval chroniclers believed that the collegiate church of St John the Baptist, still situated to the east of Dee house, was founded about 689 by King Aethelred of Mercia and a Bishop Wilfric (possibly St Wilfrid). The choice of location is significant as it may have been connected with the memory of christian martyrs associated with the amphitheatre; there may even have been a pre-existing christian martyrium or shrine on the site. Matthews has suggested that some of the later masonry inserted in to the amphitheatre's eastern entrance might be associated with the earliest manifestation of St John's church and could represent the use of the entrance as a crypt (Matthews, 2003). It is possible that royal patronage in this landscape may have encouraged settlement and trade along the adjacent riverside between the Groves and Lower Bridge Street during the 7th to 9th centuries.

12.12.2. Following a Viking raid on Chester in 893 Aethelflaed Queen of Mercia (and

daughter of Alfred the Great) strengthened the decayed Roman walls and extended them down to the river in order to create a fortified town (burh) in 907. Whatever, the status of the amphitheatre as a fortification it is likely that this was eclipsed by the creation of the royal burh and this period may have seen the beginning of the slighting and stone robbing of the amphitheatre to provide material for the new town walls.

12.12.3. In the 10th century St John's was still an important religious establishment with a monopoly of burial rites outside the defences of Chester, and it retained royal and aristocratic patronage. It was used by King Edgar in 973 for an important political gathering at which British and Viking princes demonstrated their submission by rowing Edgar up the river Dee to the church. Fragments of several pre-conquest sandstone crosses have been recovered from St John's churchyard and approximately 40 coins from the reign of Edward the Elder (899-944) were found to the west of the present church in the 19th century. Construction work during the building of the Civil Justice Centre (1999-2000) uncovered two 10th century human burials beneath what is now the car park (immediately south-east of Dee House).

12.12.4. It seems likely that there would have been a definable boundary around St John's church by the late Saxon period which would have separated it from any adjacent secular settlement. By the time of the Norman conquest St John's was held by the Bishop of Lichfield and is described as being in the Bishop's Borough (*in burgo episcopi*) and the manor of Redcliffe. The Bishop's Borough was surrounded by a ditch and early mapping suggests that the western and northern boundaries were defined by Souter's Lane and the western arc of the amphitheatre.

12.13. Theme 10: The medieval cathedral and collegiate church of St John

12.13.1. Following the Norman Conquest of 1066 the walls of the Saxon burh at Chester were extended and a castle was built within the circuit; located to dominate the harbour and the town. The church of St John's was also maintained, probably because of its earlier historical and ecclesiastical importance. The church was elevated to the status of a cathedral in 1075 (Chester's first cathedral) when the see of Lichfield was moved to Chester, and

by 1086 a college of canons had been established there. In 1102 the see was transferred again to Coventry; but St John's remained an important collegiate church throughout the medieval period and retained bishop's and archdeacon's residences within its precincts.

12.13.2. Despite much rebuilding, parts of the original Norman cathedral structure still survive within St John's church and in a ruinous state outside. The fine Norman nave, some of the finest Norman architecture surviving in Cheshire, belongs to the rebuilding which took place during the 11th and 12th centuries. Further stone robbing of the Roman amphitheatre walls was probably carried out at this time to provide material for this rebuilding.

12.13.3. By the end of the 11th century there was a precinct around St John's church which included other churches and chapels as well as the bishop's residences. Some divisions within the precinct can still be identified with historic mapping and surviving standing walls. The modern pattern of roads and paths around St John's and the amphitheatre had been established by the 15th century, some skirting their way around the precinct boundary and others leading to St John's. The presence of ecclesiastical boundaries prevented the intensive building of domestic and commercial properties along the road sides which are seen elsewhere in Chester in the medieval period. However, a small amount of development did occur opposite the Wolf Gate and along the north side of the amphitheatre site where excavation has revealed cess pits dating from c.1200 onwards. These pits would have occupied the back land of medieval tenements and produced environmental remains with a huge potential to enhance knowledge about domestic life in medieval Chester.

12.13.4. Medieval activity within the area of the Roman arena was evidenced by the gradual accumulation of cultivation soils; with the arena wall finally disappearing from view beneath these soils during the 14th century. To the east of Dee House the walls of a successive number of medieval buildings were found overlying the Roman seating bank but much of the former amphitheatre area may well have remained relatively open ground within St John's precinct (as shown on Speed's map of 1610).

12.14.Theme 11: The suppression of St John's

12.14.1. At the suppression of St John's in 1547 the college of canons was surrounded by a large precinct, which contained other college buildings, chapels and bishops and deans residences (Figure 14). Excavations to the east of Dee House between 2004-05 recovered evidence for elaborate decoration in the form of fine plaster moulding and ceramic floor and wall tiles. A large cess pit located in Area C could be dated to the 16th century and produced evidence for feasting including a large quantity of animal bones from many types of wild and domestic birds, fish bone including salmon and rays and a great deal of beef bone. Artefacts recovered from the pit included a rare tin-glazed earthenware toasting cup/jug in the shape of an owl (Plate 13) and fragments from enamelled drinking glasses imported from Northern France. A gold sergeant-at-law ring inscribed with a latin motto (translating as 'the execution of the law and the preservation of the crown') and two flowers enamelled red and white was also recovered from the upper fills of this pit.

12.14.2. Following the suppression, the former collegiate buildings around the precinct became residences for the local gentry and a bishop's and archdeacon's residences were retained. In 1581 the choir, chapels and transepts at the east end of St John's were demolished as the church was too large for the parishioners to maintain, and it was relegated to the status of a parish church.

12.15.Theme 12: The English Civil War and its aftermath

12.15.1. The area of the amphitheatre and St John's church played an important role during the Civil War siege of Chester (Figures 15 and 16). As the principle port for Ireland and with extensive road connections to the North, Midlands and North Wales, Chester was a place of great strategic importance. Though the city walls had been neglected, when the political situation deteriorated and civil war threatened, they were strengthened by earthen ramparts piled up behind the stone walls. An extensive network of outworks was also hastily constructed to protect the suburbs and provide a first line of defence. To deny cover to the attackers many properties close to the walls were demolished and it is likely that some of the prestigious residences formed by the former college buildings of St John's suffered this fate.

12.15.2. The city was garrisoned by the King in 1645 and on the 19th September the outworks were breached by the parliamentarian army and the suburbs fell. Two days later the defending commander, Lord Byron, was surprised when two or more canon were brought up and installed in St John's churchyard under the cover of buildings which had not been demolished. After 32 shots had been fired a breach was made in the city wall within the vicinity of what is now the Roman Gardens; but the subsequent assault was beaten back by fierce resistance. The city was then bombarded from numerous points and a combination of the destruction, starvation and disease caused the royalists to surrender on 3rd February 1646. Excavations to the east of Dee House in Areas B and C produced over 100 pieces of spent lead shot of varying calibres from pistol to musket balls; other items included lead caps from bandolier cartridges and a powder-flask spout. This debris must extend over a wide area as excavations within the western end of Grosvenor Park (to the east of St John's church) have recovered a similar but more numerous spread of material associated with the site of Cholmondeley House (Garner, 2007).

12.16. Theme 13: Dee House and the 18th century Mansions

12.16.1. The early 18th century marked a rise in the commercial and social importance of Chester. Much rebuilding took place, including fashionable houses and large formal gardens. The city walls were repaired and converted in to a promenade connecting the city to the river and a new fashionable riverside walk called the Groves was created. The area of the former amphitheatre and associated gentry houses around St John's assumed a new importance as with few surviving buildings it offered suitable open space to provide a distinctive quality of seclusion and spaciousness (a cross between a cathedral close and a villa suburb).

12.16.2. By the mid-18th century eight mansions with their associated gardens had been established in the area between the amphitheatre site, St John's and the Groves. The character of the landscape and architecture towards the end of the 18th century is well represented on a water colour by Moses Griffith; there is also a later aerial view of the area shown in McGahey's view of Chester from the east in 1855 (Plate 14). The siting of these larger houses was significant as



they all faced or had gardens overlooking delightful prospects over the River Dee and the Groves promenade. They also enjoyed proximity of the partially ruined St John's church and the former Hermitage (Anchorite's Cell) which would have appealed to the increasingly popular antiquarian taste. Only three of these mansions now survive: Dee House, the Old Bishop's Palace and St John's Rectory.

12.16.3. Dee House and its gardens were built over the southern and western parts of the Roman amphitheatre in c.1730, and another mansion called St John's House with its gardens was built over the northern and eastern parts of the amphitheatre at a slightly later date. Dee House is likely to have been built for James Comberbach (d.1735), a former mayor and alderman of Chester. Its plot was originally within the former precincts of the medieval collegiate church of St John and its boundaries were influenced by the layout of the college. At least part of one of the collegiate buildings shown on the 17th century plan of St John's falls within the eastern end of the present Dee House gardens (Figure 14). To the east, south and west of Dee House were formal gardens of which the southern one was laid out into four rectangular beds separated by paths. The house itself was set back from the public road rather than fronting directly on to the street. The area between the house and the gates was occupied by a carriage-turning circle, and to the west were a stable block and coach-house (Figure 17).

12.16.4. The original plan of Dee House is intact and consists of a double-pile main block with a five-bay north front and service range projecting westwards from the rear half. It has three storeys with cellars under the northern half of the main block. The principle reception rooms are on the ground floor in the eastern half of the main block with smaller rooms in the western half on either side of the large stair hall. The construction is in brick with red sandstone details, and the internal walls are executed in studwork with brick nogging. The cellars for this building were dug in to the south-western seating bank of the Roman amphitheatre.

12.16.5. Changes to the footprint of Dee House can be seen between de Lavaux's map of 1745 (Figure 17) and a later one by Murray and Stuart of 1791 (Figure 18).

These maps show that to the south the Bishop's Palace (built in the 18th century for Bishop Peploe) had been extended west and north so that it bordered the southern garden boundary of Dee House, and a long range of outbuildings had been added to the south-eastern boundary. To the east of Dee House the remains of a later 18th century cellared building were found on the eastern property boundary in Area B of the recent excavations (2004-05). This building is shown on the 1791 map (Figure 18) and subsequent maps up to 1821.

12.17.Theme 14: The Catholic Convent and 20th century decline

12.17.1.The 19th century witnessed the architectural reassertion of the Roman Catholic presence in town and city centres, not only through church-building but also through the establishment of convents and other institutions. Dee House became part of this resurgence in 1854 when it was acquired by the Faithful Companions of Jesus as a convent and girls' boarding school, and it became an important institution for the education of the poor in Chester. In 1867 a purpose built three-storey chapel block and schoolrooms were added by the Liverpool architect Edmund Kirby (1838-1920) in a muscular Gothic interpretation of the Early English style (Figure 19). Kirby was a pupil of Edward Welby Pugin and worked with John Douglas (arguably Chester's most celebrated architect) and the Catholic Church was one of his most important clients. The northern section of the range along Souter's Lane, consisting of five bays and two storeys, appears to be contemporary and is probably also by Kirby. In the last quarter of the 19th century a three-storey in-fill block, roughly matching the original house in its details, was built in the angle formed by the main block and service wing (Figure 20). During this period the gardens were also extensively altered when the gardens between Dee House and St John's church (formerly belonging to St John's House) were acquired by the convent. The gardens included a large lawn, a prayer walk and a prospect mound which was surmounted by a statue of Our Lady (Ainsworth & Wilmott, 2005).

12.17.2.Towards the end of the century the area suffered a significant loss of Georgian buildings with the demolition of five of the eight large houses built

during the 18th century. The tower of St John's which had dominated the area since the medieval period collapsed in 1881. The open character of the wider area was retained with the formalisation of the earlier garden and park landscape of Cholmondeley House into the Grosvenor Park in 1867.

12.17.3. In 1925 continuity of a religious and educational focus to the area was maintained when Dee House was acquired by the Ursuline Order and new school buildings were subsequently erected to the south; leading to the discovery of the amphitheatre in 1929. Further wings were added in 1955 and 1960, containing respectively a domestic science laboratory and library and a physics laboratory and art room (Figure 21), but the institution's days were numbered. The advent of the comprehensive school system and the opening of a new Catholic high school nearby led to the closure of the school at Dee House in September 1976. The building was acquired by Post Office Telephones (later British Telecom) and converted into a telephone exchange with offices and training facilities. It stayed in BT's hands until 1993, when it was sold to Chester City Council. In recent years it has been boarded up as a result of a fire.