

Site of former convent, Pennywell Road St. Paul's, Bristol

Archaeological Monitoring

Bristol HER 24720

BRSMG 2009/8



for

Connolly and Callaghan Limited

D. Etheridge B.A. M.Phil. FSA Scot

Avon Archaeological Unit Limited

Bristol: January 2009

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Report Prepared by:
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ABSTRACT

Avon Archaeological Unit Limited was commissioned by Connolly and Callaghan Limited to undertake the archaeological monitoring of groundworks associated with the development for residential housing of a c. 858 m² site on the east side of Pennywell Road at the junction with Bates Close, St. Paul's, Bristol (NGR ST 6006 7383).

This project was generated in response to a Brief for Archaeological Monitoring issued by Mr R. H. Jones, City Archaeologist of Bristol City Council. The work was carried out according to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Avon Archaeological Unit Limited and agreed with Mr R. H. Jones.

During historic times the Study Area appears to have been vacant land, probably used for market gardening. It was still vacant in 1855 but by 1874 had been developed for terraced housing that was still extant in 1945. The Study Area had most recently been used as a convent, but the former convent buildings had been demolished before the commencement of this exercise.

The digging of machine-excavated trenches was monitored on the 19th and 20th January for the presence of finds, deposits or the remains of former structures of archaeological significance. A gravel layer tentatively identified as a geological deposit known as the Greensand was observed in section across the southern portion of the site at approximately 10.70 m aOD. The Greensand has been dated to the Pleistocene era, and in other parts of Bristol has been associated with finds of Palaeolithic implements.

In at least two places evidence was exposed for 19th century structures that pre-dated the later 20th century convent buildings. A former floor surface, wall footing and a ceramic drain were identified in the west facing southeast section of site, while the remains of a partly demolished and backfilled cellar were identified in the northwest corner of the site. Two pits in the southern portion of the site indicated further evidence for activity in the 19th century, as well as potentially in the 18th century. The 19th century finds and structures exposed are commensurate with the former presence of later 19th century tenements within the Study Area shown on detailed mapping from 1874 till 1945.

With the cessation of all major excavation work within the Study Area, this archaeological monitoring project has now been concluded. The project archive will be stored at the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery under the Accession number BRSMG 2009/8.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Avon Archaeological Unit Limited wish to acknowledge the assistance given by the following in the production of this report: Mr David Plimmer of Rose Project Services, acting as agent for Connolly and Callaghan Limited; Mr R H Jones, City Archaeologist and Mr Peter Insole, Archaeological Officer, Bristol City Council; Ross Savile and the staff of Sharemills Building Contractors. The author would also like to thank Andrew Young and Lynn Hume, of Avon Archaeological Unit Limited, for assistance with preparation of this report.

NOTES

Whereas Avon Archaeological Unit Limited have taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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ABBREVIATIONS

aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
BHER	Bristol Historic Environment Record
OS	Ordnance Survey

1. INTRODUCTION (see Figures 1, 2 and 3)

The Study Area is a plot of land c. 858 m² located in the St. Paul's district of Bristol (NGR ST 6006 7383). A convent building that formerly stood on part of the Study Area has recently been demolished.

Avon Archaeological Unit Limited was commissioned to undertake an archaeological monitoring exercise of the Study Area during groundworks related to the construction of residential accommodation, for Connolly and Callaghan Limited.

This project was generated in response to a condition (no. 9) for archaeological monitoring issued by the City Archaeologist Mr R. H. Jones, attached to planning application no. 06/04883/P.

2. GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND CURRENT LAND USE (see Figures 1, 2 and 3)

Pennywell Road runs along a very slight ridge of high ground aligned roughly north-south and parallel to the River Frome, and located on the eastern side of the lower Frome valley. The land rises from 11.0 m aOD near the banks of the Frome to 12.0 m aOD on Pennywell Road, opposite the Study Area, before falling away to 11.6 m aOD on Goodhind Street, to the east.

The underlying geology of the Study Area comprises sandstone of the Redcliff Sandstone formation belonging to the Mercia Mudstone Group of the Triassic era (British Geological Survey 2004). The Bedminster Great Coal Seam runs some 150 m west of the Study Area (ibid.) with the former Pennywell Colliery located some 200 m to the north (OS 1903). A layer of red loam with occasional pebbles or greensand chert was observed nearby in a section on the north side of Pennywell Road (BHER 3172). The presence of greensand chert suggests the origins of this deposit lie in the Pleistocene era (Bates 2005, paras. 3.6 and 4.13).

The Study Area lies on the east side of Pennywell Road (BS5 0TU), on the northern side of the angle created by the junction with Bates Close, a cul-de-sac serving two rows of terraces houses. Thus the Study Area is surrounded to west, south and east by road with paved footpath. To the north runs an unnamed but adopted footpath closed to vehicular traffic. An electricity sub-station adjoining a row of garages on the north side of Bates Close stands near the northeast corner of the Study Area.

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The Study Area lies on land that up to 1855 was shown on maps as open agricultural land. The city surveyor's maps of 1874 and the first detailed Ordnance Survey maps of 1883 onwards show it as built over with terraced housing, which situation still pertained on maps from 1945. The Study Area lay on the east side of Pennywell Road, while to the north ran former King Street (no longer extant). Thus two rows of terraced housing crossed the Study Area, one along the north side and the other along the Pennywell Road frontage.

Much terraced housing in the St. Paul's district was demolished in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with an associated change in the road layout. Without further study it seems likely the former tenements were demolished, Bates Close laid out, and the convent building constructed at about that time.

A trawl of the Bristol Historic Environment Record revealed no known archaeological sites or finds on or immediately adjacent to the Study Area. About 100 m to the north formerly stood a structure known as Earls Mead House, apparently demolished by c. 1880 (BHER 2868M). A former 19th century armoury stood about 200 m to the east of the Study Area (BHER 2067M).

As noted above, a layer of red loam with occasional pebbles or greensand chert was in 1939 observed c. 150 m to the west, in a section on the north side of Pennywell Road (BHER 3172). The presence of greensand chert suggests the origins of this deposit lie in the Pleistocene era (Bates 2005, paras. 3.6 and 4.13). Although in other parts of Bristol Palaeolithic artefacts have been associated with this deposit, to date none are known from the Frome valley (*ibid.*).

4. METHODOLOGY

The author and Mr Andrew Young carried out the Watching Brief in January 2009. The Study Area was attended on the 19th and 20th January 2009, during which digital still photographs and hand written notes were made.

The project was carried out in accordance with a brief issued 5th March 2007 (Condition 9, Planning Application Reference 06/04883/P) by Mr R. H. Jones, the City Archaeologist, to a Scheme of Works dated January 2009, drawn up by Avon Archaeological Unit Limited and agreed with Mr R. H. Jones.

All excavation works on site were monitored by an experienced and qualified archaeologist under the direct supervision of Mr Andrew Young, principal archaeologist of Avon Archaeological Unit Limited. Monitoring was ceased after it was determined that further excavation works would only disturb recently made ground.

In total all machine excavated ground level reduction and machine excavated trenches for footings were observed. In most cases it was safe to enter these excavations once machine excavation was complete. Most of the soil 'islands' between these trenches were considered unsuitable to walk on. In the northeast corner of the site, where the section depth reached 2.0 m, the trenches deemed unsafe to enter. Recording was undertaken by scale drawn sections and plans, photographic observations, and written single context proforma sheets together with hand-written notes. These will be deposited together with the rest of the project archive at the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery under the accession number BRSMG 2009/8.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD (see Figures 3, 4 and Plates)

5.1. Ground Level Reduction

Archaeological monitoring of the Study Area commenced on the 19th of January 2009. Access to the Study Area was gained from Bates Close. Initial machine excavation to reduce the ground level by c. 600 mm in the area of proposed foundation trenches was commenced. The heavy rain that preceded this operation made it difficult to observe anything of archaeological significance, though concrete footings for the former convent building were in places revealed.

5.2. Foundation Trenches

Recording of the excavated foundation trenches was undertaken on the 20th of January 2009. Mechanical excavation commenced in the southeast corner and continued around the site in a clockwise fashion towards the northern boundary. Recording therefore commenced in the southeast corner of the site.

Because of the earlier ground level reduction and the general layout of the trenches, only two complete sections across the Study Area were revealed, one west facing section on the southeast side and one south facing on the northern boundary. As the latter was over 2.0 m deep it was considered unsafe to enter that part of the trench, though a sketch section was made of the soil profile in the northeast corner. The narrowness of the trenches made it difficult to undertake photography of either section.

5.2.1. West Facing Section (see Figure 4 and Plate a)

The west facing section was drawn in profile at a scale of 1:20 and a written record was made on proforma context sheets. Although there was some slight variation, this section was in general 1.6 m deep. A datum line was established at 10.70 m aOD, putting the base of the trench at approximately 10.50 m aOD.

The earliest material exposed in section was a mid to light yellowish red loose sand layer (**111**), also exposed throughout in the floor and sides of all the excavated trenches. No artefacts or ecofacts were observed in this layer, of which up to 300 mm thickness was exposed. Layer **111** is interpreted as a natural deposit of eroded and decomposed bedrock.

This was overlain by a layer (**110**) up to 300 mm thick of varying mid yellowish brown or mid red brown clay sand containing very many rounded sandstone gravels that were the most distinctive feature of this layer. Again, no artefacts or ecofacts were observed in this layer, the occurrence of which throughout the trenches was widespread but not observed throughout. This layer appeared to peter out towards the northern end of the section, although later features associated with the convent had heavily truncated that part of the section, which was also partially obscured by more recent disturbance. Layer **110** is interpreted as a natural deposit, possibly part of a sequence of Pleistocene river terrace gravels known from the Bristol Avon basin (see below for further information).

Layer **110** was completely sealed in section by a layer (**109**) up to 290 mm thick of grey brown sandy clay with some rounded gravel inclusions that again yielded no artefacts or ecofacts. It was interpreted as a natural sub-soil. This was in turn sealed by layer **108**, up to 460 mm thick, of dark green grey sandy silt containing flecks and fragments of coal together with sub-angular sandstone gravels and a few fragments of brick/tile. Layer **108** is interpreted as a post medieval cultivation soil, possibly a garden soil due to the presence of domestic and construction/demolition debris.

Soil **108** was partially sealed by an up to 50 mm thick layer of crushed brick and lime mortar (**107**) interpreted as a former floor surface and probably dating to the 18th or earlier 19th centuries. Layer **108** was truncated to the north by cut **105**, itself heavily truncated, and filled with roughly laid half bricks in a mid red brown sandy clay, possibly representing the foundations for a former structure.

Layer **107** was cut by drainage trench **101**, which appeared to have been heavily over-dug and was subsequently largely backfilled before the 220 mm bore ceramic drain was laid. This drain was also partly observed in plan extending some 7.2 m in a northwesterly direction. The fill was sealed by layer **106**, up to 240 mm thick of dark brown silty sand with bands of crushed brick, crushed lime mortar and grey ash also including larger brick fragments and lime mortar nodules, interpreted as a construction/demolition deposit. Layer **106** is broadly contemporary with layer **113** in the southern end of the section, a dark grey sandy silt with many loose bricks (lime mortar adhering) and brick/tile fragments, interpreted as a demolition deposit.

At its northern end layer **106** was truncated by cut **102**, 1.04 m deep, for a ceramic drain encased in concrete that ran west for 13.71 m along the northern section edge of this part of the excavations. Feature **102** is interpreted as a drain for the former convent building.

Both layers **106** and **113** were truncated by shallow pit **112** up to 260 mm deep, containing a single fill of dark grey sandy silt interpreted as former garden soil. This was sealed by a 280 mm thick deposit (**104**) of light yellowish green sandy silty clay interpreted as a ground makeup layer for overlying surface **103** comprised partly of tarmac and partly of concrete paving slabs. The latter is interpreted as the remnant external ground surface for the former convent building.

5.2.2. Other Features

Pit **114** was V-shaped in section, 500 mm wide by 600 mm deep and was exposed in a north facing section towards the southeast corner of the site (see **Plate b**). It was filled with a dark grey sandy silt with occasional flecks of white lime and fine fragments of coal. Finds (discarded) included the occasional small fragment of glass and one clay tobacco pipe stem fragment. The top of the feature was truncated by machining, but appeared to have been cut through layer **108**. This feature is interpreted as a pit cut for a post or a large stake hole, later backfilled with post medieval garden topsoil.

In the central section of the southernmost trench, pit **115** was observed in opposing north and south facing sections, together with the adjoining west facing section (see **Plate c**). The shape in plan of this pit was not confirmed, but as exposed it was 3.4 m wide. The sides in section were vertical, and the pit extended 700 mm to the base of the trench. Pit **115** was filled with bands of: black ash, dark brown silty sand, white lime mortar flecks, and brick/tile fragments. This feature is interpreted as a large post-medieval rubbish pit. It was cut into the natural sub-soil, but heavy ground disturbance at this location obscured its relationship to later archaeological activity.

Pit **117** was located towards the southwestern corner of the site and observed in opposing east and west facing trench sections (see **Plate d**). This feature was probably trench shaped or ovoid in plan, to a maximum length of 3.20 m along a north-south aligned long axis, with a minimum width of 1.20 m. In section the cut had steep concave sides with a rounded basal angle and a flat base with slight irregularities. The upper portion of this feature had probably been truncated during the earlier ground level reduction, leaving a surviving depth of 550 mm to the base of the trench. This pit was uniformly filled with a mid red brown almost loose silty sand (**116**) with many flecks and lumps of white lime, sometimes occurring in bands, and many sub-rounded sandstone gravels. There were also a few small brick/tile fragments. The exact purpose of this feature is unclear, but the backfilling appears to have been associated with the production or distribution of white lime.

Features observed in the central area of the excavations were on investigation found to be concrete filled footings for the former convent building now demolished.

In the northwest edge of site several apparently related masonry features were observed in opposing east and west facing sections. Principal among these was feature **118**, a large deep cut observed in the east facing section (see **Plate e**). As exposed it was c. 2.5 m wide in section and c. 2.0 m deep from the ground surface down. The fill was almost entirely composed of brick rubble, with loose dark grey soil and lumps of white lime mortar. On the southern side of the cut the remains of what appeared to be a north-south aligned mortared brick wall were visible. On the northern side of the cut were hints of former pennant sandstone masonry in the rubble backfill.

In the opposite west facing section, parts of two truncated east-west aligned walls were observed projecting from the section. Because of the unstable nature of the opposite feature it was only possible to record these features visually from a short distance. Their location as marked on **Figure 3** is therefore only approximate. As exposed, wall **119** consisted of four courses of pennant sandstone slabs (see **Plate F**). A short distance to the north, wall **120** was indicated by two courses of sandstone slabs. Between the two walls was an area of mixed soil and rubble fill (**121**), probably a continuation of the cellar fill opposite.

As exposed these features together most likely represent the partially demolished and in-filled remains of a collapsed brick and sandstone masonry built cellar, of a type common in Bristol in the 18th and 19th centuries. Due to the unstable nature of the section no finds were retrieved from this group of features.

6. THE FINDS

A total of 29 finds were retrieved during this monitoring exercise.

Context	Material	Count	Weight (grams)	Description
100 (unstratified)	Pot	11	244	2 Somerset red ware: 1 rim sherd pancheon (glazed), 19 th C, 1 body sherd pancheon (glazed), 19 th C. 3 Miscellaneous white wares, 19 th C. 1 Fragment from imitation porcelain vegetation. 3 Bristol Staffordshire slipware 17 th – 18 th C: 1 pie crust rim sherd, 1 body sherd with combed decoration, 1 plain body sherd. 1 Westerwald body sherd 16 th – 17 th century. 1 green glazed medieval jug handle with stab decoration.
	Glass	3	8	1 green wine bottle body shard 17 th -21 st C. 1 clear bottle glass shard, 17 th –19 th C. 1 opaque blue glass bead (rolled)
	Clay Tobacco Pipe	3	<5	Pipe stem fragments, 16 th -19 th C.
108	Pot	2	20	1 body sherd stoneware bottle, 19 th C.. 1 body sherd glazed Somerset red ware, 19 th C.
115	Pot	3	170	2 Somerset red ware: 1 rim sherd pancheon (glazed), 19 th C, 2 body sherds pancheon (glazed), 19 th C.
	Brick/Tile	1	48	1 green glazed ridge tile fragment, 13 th C.
	Clay Tobacco Pipe	1	<5	Mouthpiece fragment, 16 th -19 th C.
	Industrial Residue	1	26	Lump of aerated slag
	Animal Bone	1	28	Sheep/goat metatarsus
	Glass	1	18	1 Clear glass mould blown bottle shard with lettering, 19 th C.
116 , fill of 117	Pot	1	<5	1 body sherd of Bristol Staffordshire slipware, 17 th –18 th C.
	Brick/Tile	1	24	Fragment, probably handmade brick. 17 th – 19 th C.

None of these finds appear to merit specialist analysis. The majority of those finds that are datable are most likely to be of 19th century origin. Of the three stratified contexts both **108** and **115** have firm datable evidence for a date no earlier than the 19th century. Context **116** could plausibly date from the 18th century.

A reasonable distribution of residual sherds of Bristol Staffordshire slipware suggests increased activity in the area during the 18th century. Also of note were the two residual sherds of medieval glazed ceramics. The fragment of ridge tile clearly came from a medieval structure. However, as the area was probably used for market gardening in the 18th and first half of the 19th century, a manuring scatter from nearby urban sources could account for much of the material.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A programme of archaeological monitoring has been undertaken during construction groundworks on the site of a former convent located on the east side of Pennywell Road, St. Paul's, Bristol (NGR ST 6006 7383).

The project was commissioned by Connolly and Callaghan Limited, following the issue of a planning condition for an archaeological watching brief made by the Bristol City Council Planning Department. The project was undertaken by Avon Archaeological Unit Limited to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Avon Archaeological Unit Limited and agreed with the City Archaeologist of Bristol City Council.

Archaeological monitoring took place between the 19th and 20th January 2009. Machine excavated construction related trenches were observed during excavation.

During the monitoring a geological deposit of gravels in sand was observed in the sections of several excavated trenches, particularly those located in the southern half of the site. This is thought to be a deposit known as the Greensand, previously observed at a location about 100 m west of the Study Area. The Greensand probably dates to the later Middle Pleistocene (c. 380,000 to 125,000 Before Present).

Although the Greensand deposit has been associated with the discovery of Lower Palaeolithic stone tools in the St. Anne's district, no artefacts of that date were retrieved by this exercise.

Several archaeological deposits and features were observed that indicated there had been increased human activity within the Study Area during the 18th and 19th centuries. In particular parts of a brick wall and a ceramic drain that predated the convent structure were observed in a west facing section in the southeast corner of the site. These are thought to relate to former terraced housing known from map evidence to have stood within the Study Area from at least 1874 until c. 1970. In the northwest corner of the Study Area a brick and sandstone masonry feature interpreted as a demolished and backfilled cellar was identified. Comparison with the historic map evidence suggests an end of terrace structure stood at this location and it is therefore surmised the cellar represents a storage area for a local corner shop.

Two pit like cut features were identified in the southern part of the excavations. One, pit **115** yielded finds commensurate with a 19th century date, while the smaller pit **117** yielded finds of 18th century date, indicating post-medieval activity in the Study Area prior to the construction of the terraced housing in the later 19th century.

Two residual sherds of later medieval ceramics were found, including a fragment of glazed ridge tile. These finds may indicate proximity to the location of former medieval settlement, though other plausible explanations for their presence on site cannot be ruled out.

No other structures, finds or deposits of archaeological significance were observed during this monitoring exercise.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

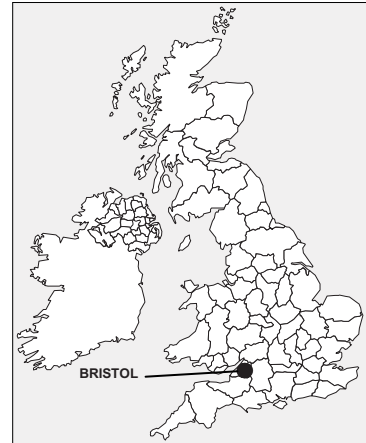
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Southampton.
- Ordnance
Survey 1945 Gloucestershire sheet 72.13. *County Series* map, scale 1:2,500.
Bristol.

Figure 1

Location of the Study Area

The Study Area ←

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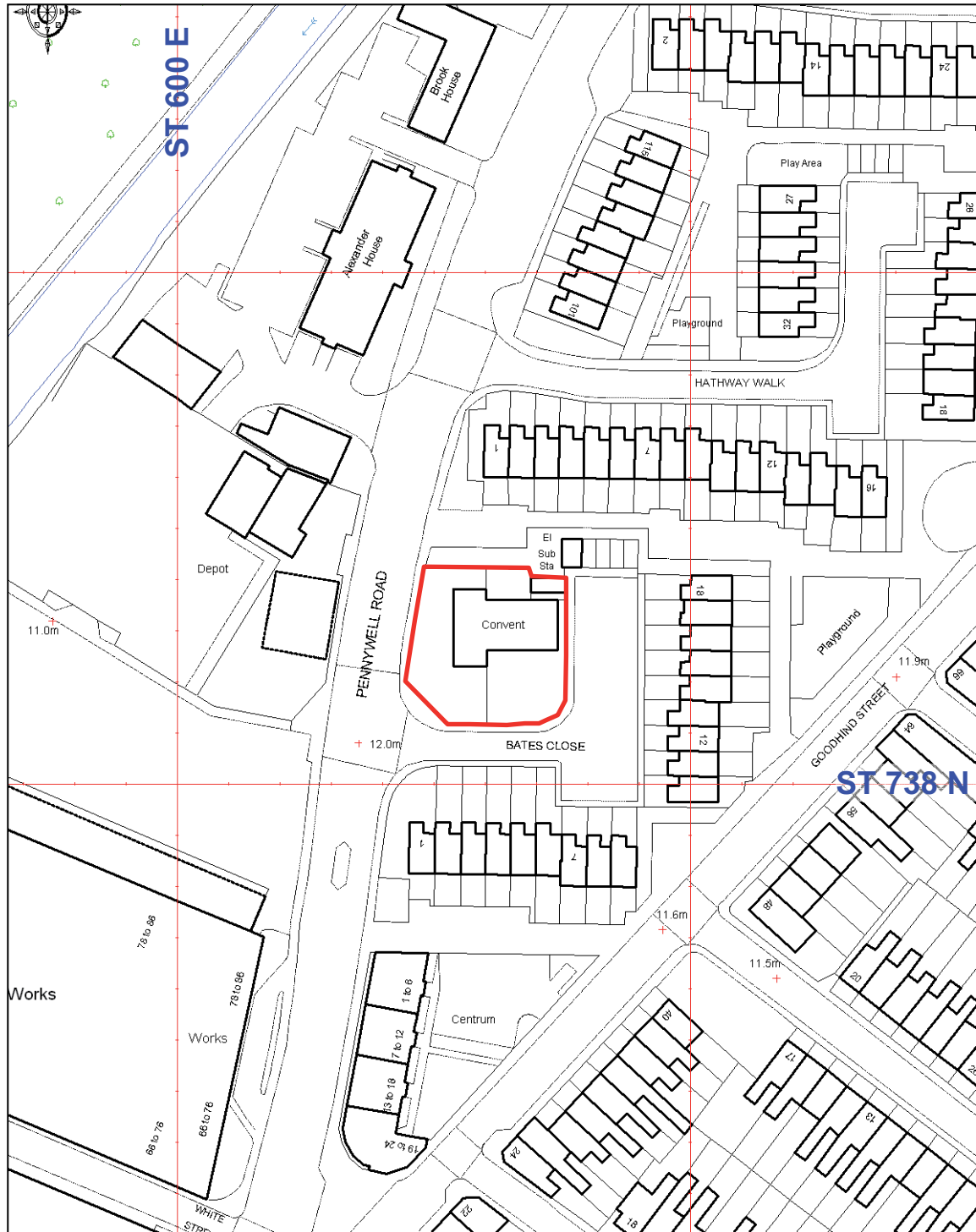
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Figure 2

Approximate Boundary of the Study Area (outlined in red)

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Scale 1:1250

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Figure 3

Feature Location Plan (plotted scale 1:200)

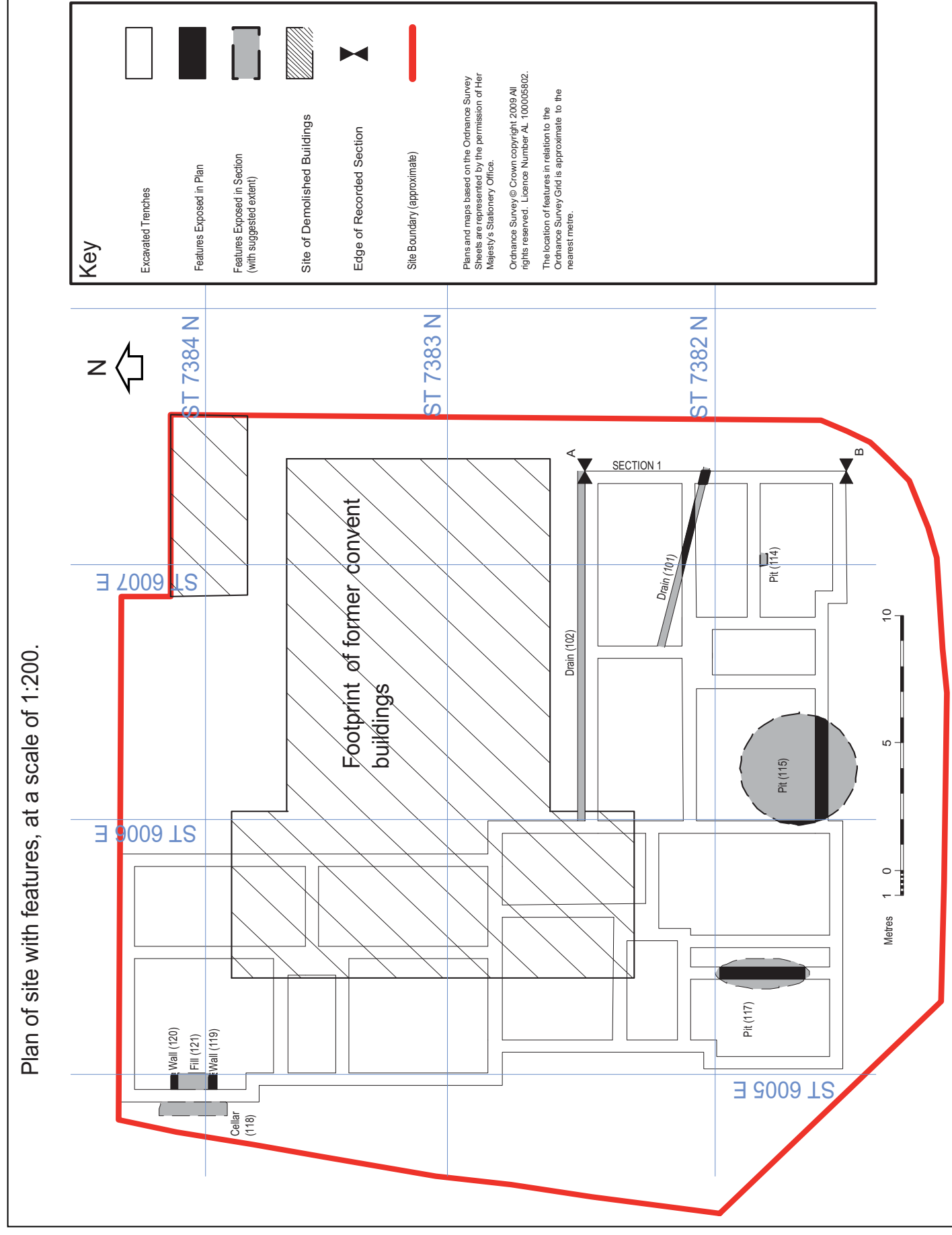
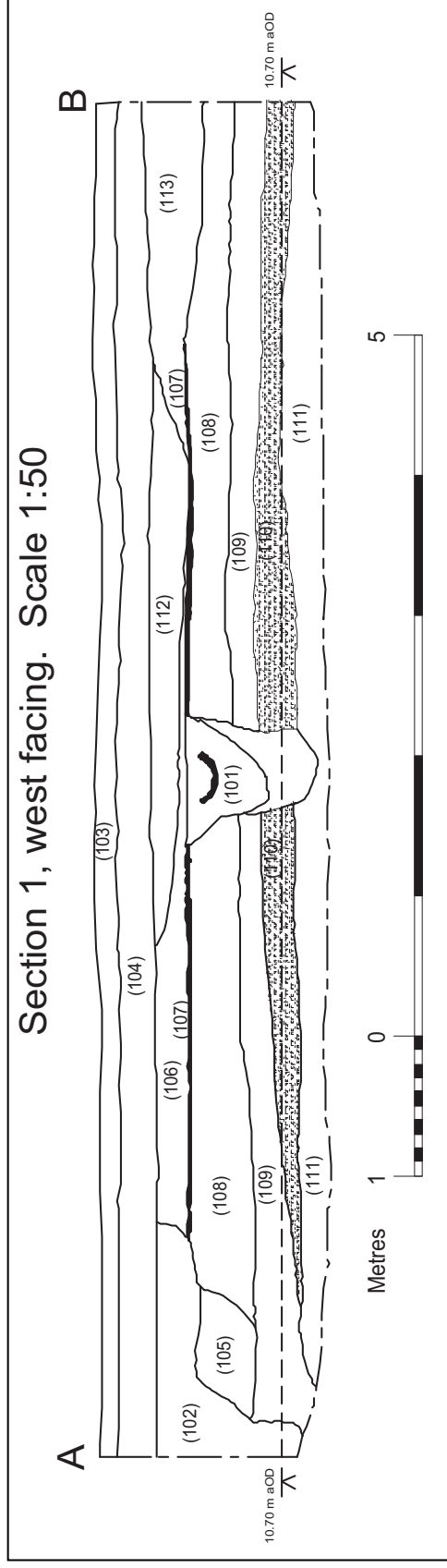


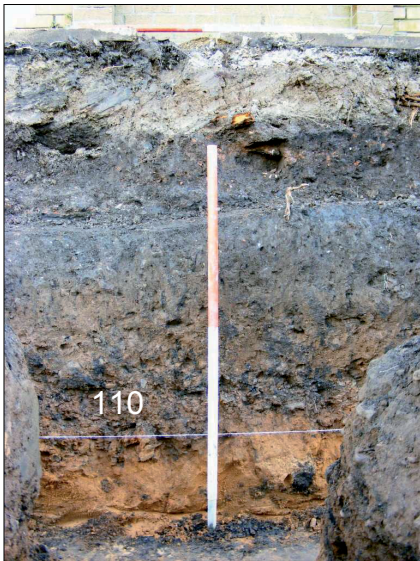
Figure 4

Section 1

See Figure 3 for location



Plates



a) View of Section 1 after cleaning, looking east. Scale 1 m.



b) Cut 114 in north facing section. Scales 1 m by 1 m.



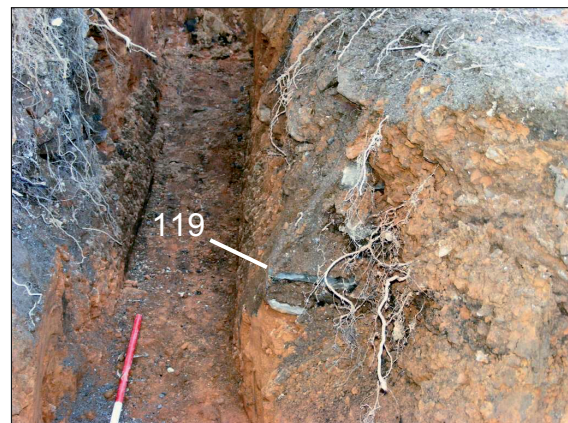
c) Pit 115 in north facing section. Scales 1 m by 1 m.



d) Pit 117 in west facing section, looking northeast. Scales 1 m by 1 m.



e) Cellar 118 in east facing section, looking northwest. Scales 1 m by 1 m.



f) Wall 119 in west facing section, looking north. No scale.