



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



Archaeological Investigations at 24-25 Portland Street, York

By A. Johnson

YAT Assessment Report 2019/175

November 2019





YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



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Abbreviations

BGL – Below Ground Level

YAT – York Archaeological Trust

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Between October 18th and November 18th 2019 York Archaeological Trust conducted an intermittent archaeological watching brief at 24-25 Portland Street, York (SE 60161 52498) (Figure 1). The work was undertaken for Merster Ltd. in response to the submission of an Area of Archaeological Importance Operations Notice (Operations Notice 19020) and involved the monitoring of foundation trenches for a single storey extension to the rear of the building and underpinning trenches below the existing external walls.

The groundworks revealed layers of modern-overburden overlying a mixture of historic ploughsoils and up-cast material relating to the construction of the building's cellar in the late 19th century. A concentration of residual Roman and medieval ceramics was noted, suggesting that settlement activity of this date may survive at greater depth.

KEY PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Name	24-25 Portland Street, York
YAT Project No.	6182
Document Number	2019/175
Type of Project	Watching Brief
Client	Merster Ltd.
Planning Application No.	Operations Notice 19020
NGR	SE 60161 52498
Museum Accession No.	Pending
OASIS Identifier	yorkarch1-374798

REPORT INFORMATION

Version	Produced by		Edited by		Approved by	
	Initials	Date	Initials	Date	Initials	Date
1	AJ	20/11/19	MS	14/01/20	MS	20/01/20

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1 INTRODUCTION

Between October 18th and November 18th 2019 York Archaeological Trust conducted an intermittent archaeological watching brief at 24-25 Portland Street, York (SE 60161 52498) (Figure 1).

The work was undertaken for Merster Ltd. in response to the submission of an Area of Archaeological Importance Operations Notice to mitigate the loss of any archaeological remains that may be affected by the development (Operations Notice 19020).

Intrusive works were observed under watching brief conditions to allow for the recording of any affected archaeological deposits.

2 METHODOLOGY

The groundworks involved the excavation of foundation and underpinning trenches measuring 0.80m in width and up to 1.70m in depth for a single storey extension measuring 8m x 2m (Figure 2). Excavations were mainly carried out by a Kubota KX016-4 tracked excavator equipped with a 0.80m wide toothless bucket, although much of the underpinning trenching had to be carried out by hand.

Following the excavation of a small test pit, the remaining works were monitored by regular site visits. The archaeological sequence exposed was recorded by annotated sketch plans/sections and digital photography. Where distinct deposits were observed, the standard YAT single context recording system was applied. Trenches were located on a base map provided by the client.

3 LOCATION, GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY

The works were located in the rear yard of 24-25 Portland Street adjacent to the south-east wall of an existing extension (Figure 2). The footprint of the extension covers a 16m² area bounded by the 24-25 Portland Street property and yard to the north-west, south-west and south-east and by the rear alley separating Portland Street and Claremont Terrace to the north-east. The site sits within the Central Historic Core Conservation Area and City of York Character Area 5: Gillygate (MacRae 2013).

The superficial geology of the site is the clays, sands and gravels of the Vale of York Formation overlying Sherwood Sandstone Group bedrock (British Geological Survey).

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Gillygate has its origins in the medieval period, with building plots laid out on the south-west side of the street from the mid-12th century. The land to the north-west was historically an open space known as the Horsefair. The medieval church of St. Giles from which Gillygate derived its name was located a short distance to the east of the site, close to the junction of Lord Mayor's Walk and Gillygate (MacRae 2013; 166).

The church is first referred to in documentary sources in 1145-61 and may have been a chapel owned by St. Mary's Abbey. Like many York churches, it was deconsecrated in 1586 and was

united with the parish of St. Olave. While in private ownership, the churchyard received the burials of plague victims in 1605 and executed criminals reportedly continued to be interred on-site as late as 1693 (Wilson and Mee 1998; 83). The precise date of the church's demolition is not known, although its absence from 18th century mapping would suggest it did not survive into the 1700s.

A period of rapid expansion in the mid-19th century led to the construction of the first buildings on the north-west side of Gillygate, although Portland Street was not laid out until later in the 19th century (MacRae 2013; 166). Portland Street presently survives with little alteration to its late 19th century appearance; the street is broad and lined by uniform three storey townhouses with basements.

Alongside recording the date and nature of the site's archaeological sequence, a principal aim of the watching brief was to investigate whether the churchyard of the St. Giles extended beneath Portland Street.

5 RESULTS

A uniform archaeological sequence was observed in all interventions on the site. The earliest deposit observed during the works was a layer of soft, mid-brownish yellow slightly sandy clay between 1.50m and 1.70m BGL (Context 105; Figure 3; Plate 1). The ceramics recovered from this deposit were exclusively Roman in date, including sherds of mortaria, Grey wares and colour coated wares. As only a small amount of this deposit was removed, its date remains uncertain; although the absence of any modern material may suggest that this deposit represents the upper extent of undisturbed archaeology. Whether this layer does represent Roman activity or medieval deposition with re-deposited Roman ceramics is uncertain.

A layer of soft, dark grey to black silty clay was present across the site between 0.75m and 1.50m BGL (Contexts 103; 104; Figure 3; Plate 1). This deposit was interpreted as a horticultural layer relating to the site's use as farmland prior to the late-19th century. The deposit was noteworthy in that it contained a high level of residual material dating from the Roman period to the 19th century. The Roman assemblage included samian, Grey ware, colour coated ware and Calcite Gritted ware; medieval Brandsby ware and 18th-19th century transfer and white wares were also present. This broad date range may be a result of repeated ploughing bringing buried material to the surface, although some of the material may also have been up-cast during the construction of 24-25 Portland Street's cellar. In either case, the frequency of Roman and medieval ceramics from a small area is suggestive of deposits relating to settlement activity surviving in situ at greater depth.

The remainder of the sequence comprised 0.63m of mixed make-up deposits of soft, light-yellowish brown sandy clay and mid-greyish brown sandy silt; both contained inclusions of gravel, brick and tile rubble, coal fragments and mortar flecks (Contexts 101; 102; Figure 3; Plate 1). All deposits were sealed below a 100mm thick surface of concrete (Context 100).

6 POTTERY ASSESSMENT

By Anne Jenner

6.1 Introduction

Twenty-one sherds were retrieved from five contexts during archaeological intervention at Portland Street. They are all from vessels that were probably used in a domestic context. They range in size from small to large (<5cms to >10cms). The earliest sherds are Roman. The latest sherd is a 19th century transfer printed ware. Medieval wares are also present.

6.2 Discussion

The Roman wares include a small piece of Samian which may be a 2nd century type, though Samian wares are also found in 1st century contexts and this cannot be ruled out. The latest Roman ware is probably the Colour Coated pentice moulded beaker sherds. These may be late 2nd/3rd century or later types. They may have been made in the Nene Valley or in Northern Gaul. The Grey ware jar sherds may also be from late 2nd/3rd century vessels. The white ware mortaria sherd may be of a similar date. It could have been made at a number of production centres, such as Mancetter-Hartshill.

There are a few medieval jug sherds which would have been produced in Yorkshire. These include Brandsby and Humber wares which would have been in currency in the late 13th and 14th centuries. A small sherd of Ryedale ware follows in the green glazed medieval tradition but would have been current in York in the late 16th to early 18th centuries.

Notable by their absence are the Cistercian wares. These wares are typical amongst late 15th and 16th century assemblages. It is not possible to determine whether this reflects a lack of activity in this area at that time, or whether their absence merely a reflection of the small sample size.

6.3 Recommendations for further work

A mortaria specialist may be able to shed further light on this sherd. Further analysis of the Colour Coated wares may also determine their origin and date.

Context Number	Find No.	Quantity	Dating	Details
103	BF2	7	ROMAN AND LATE 13TH CENTURY	1 Brandsby jug handle with rod shape and three vertical grooves with applied pellets and dull green glaze, large sherd. 1 Samian, small sherd. 4 Roman Greyware jar, small to large sherds including rim and base. 1 Roman Colour Coated beaker, lightly oxidised fabric and horizontal band.
104	BF3	6	ROMAN AND 19TH CENTURY	1 Transfer Printed Willow Pattern, open form, small sherd. 1 fine White ware, abraded, small sherd. 3 Roman Grey ware, small sherds.

Context Number	Find No.	Quantity	Dating	Details
				1 Calcite Gritted bowl rim, large sherd.
105	BF4	4	3RD CENTURY	1 Roman mortaria large sherd 1 Roman Grey burnished small sherd, possibly from North Gaul. 1 Roman Colour Coated pentice moulded beaker with oxidised fabric and tooled roulette decoration, large sherd. 1 Roman Colour Coated rim, probably from another pentice moulded beaker with light grey/white fabric though no rouletting is present, possibly from North Gaul.
106	BF5	3	EARLY 18TH CENTURY	1 post medieval moderately gritted oxidised green glazed base, small sherd 1 Ryedale reduced, very small sherd. 1 Late Humber type dish with flaked surface, possibly once slip decorated
108	BF6	1	LATE 13TH/14TH CENTURY	1 Humber type jug with very fine fabric and rod handle with light green brown glaze, large sherd

Table 1. Pottery quantification

7 DISCUSSION

The archaeological sequence observed during the watching brief corresponds well with the known historic development of the Gillygate area, with the majority of the deposition relating to post-medieval agricultural soils. The residual assemblage of Roman and medieval material recovered from the horticultural horizon was notable in its quantity and, along with the less disturbed material at the base of the trench (Context 105), may suggest the presence of intact medieval and earlier archaeology below the present 1.70m limit of excavation.

The absence of any human bone suggests that the churchyard of the former church of St. Giles did not extend into this area.

8 LIST OF SOURCES

British Geological Survey

<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain3d/index.html?>

MacRae, C., 2013. City of York Character Areas.

<https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/5898/5gillygate>

9 REFERENCES

Wilson, B. and Mee, F., 1998. *The Medieval Parish Churches of York. The Pictorial Evidence.* The Archaeology of York Supplementary Series Volume 1. York Archaeological Trust

10 PLATES



Plate 1 West facing view of archaeological sequence exposed in foundation trench section.



Plate 2 General site shot of the works, view south-west.

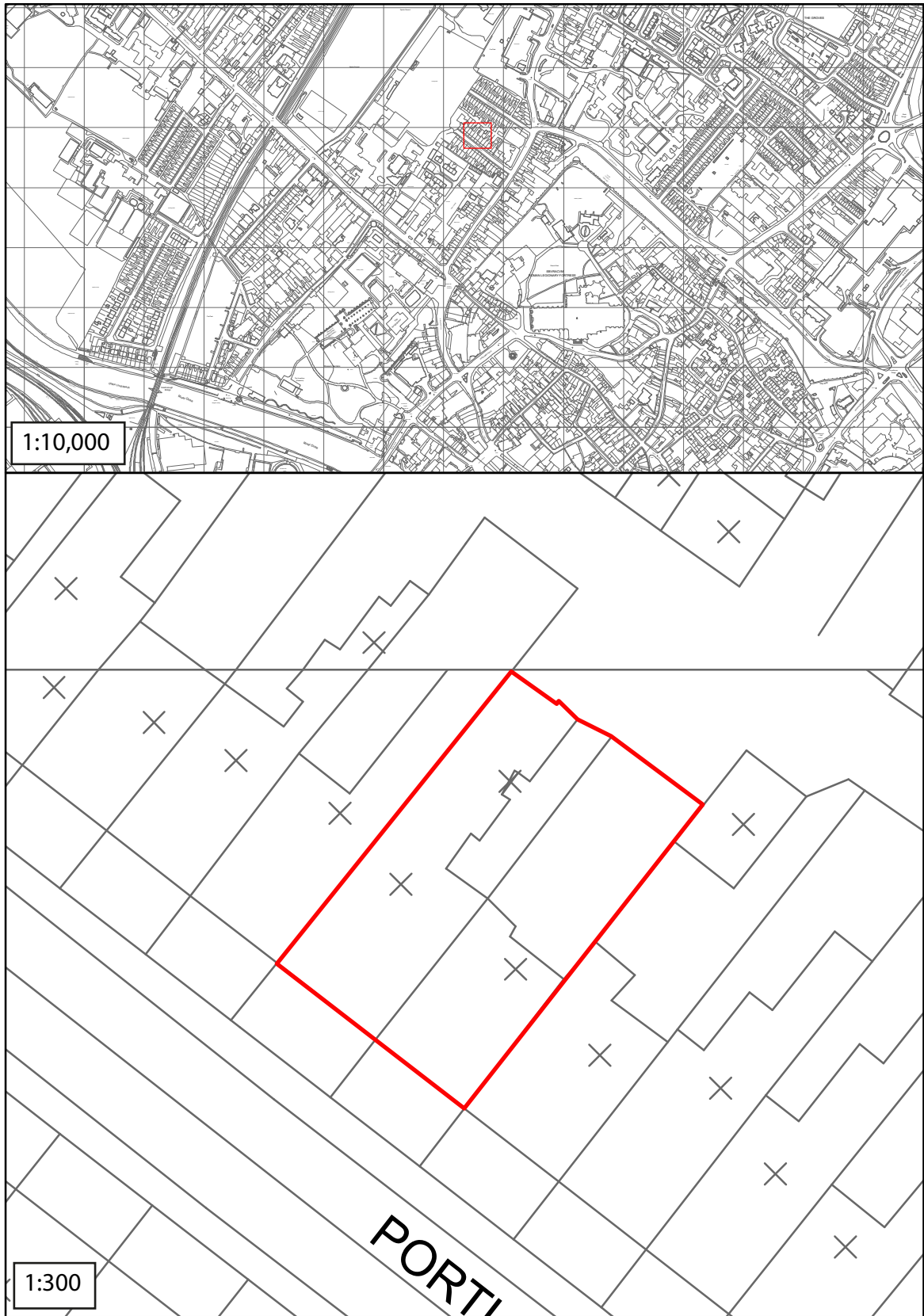
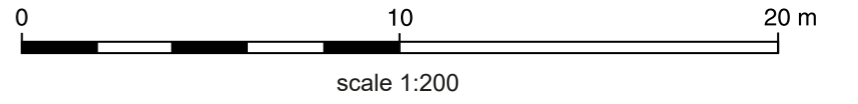


Figure 1 Site location



460125

460150

460175

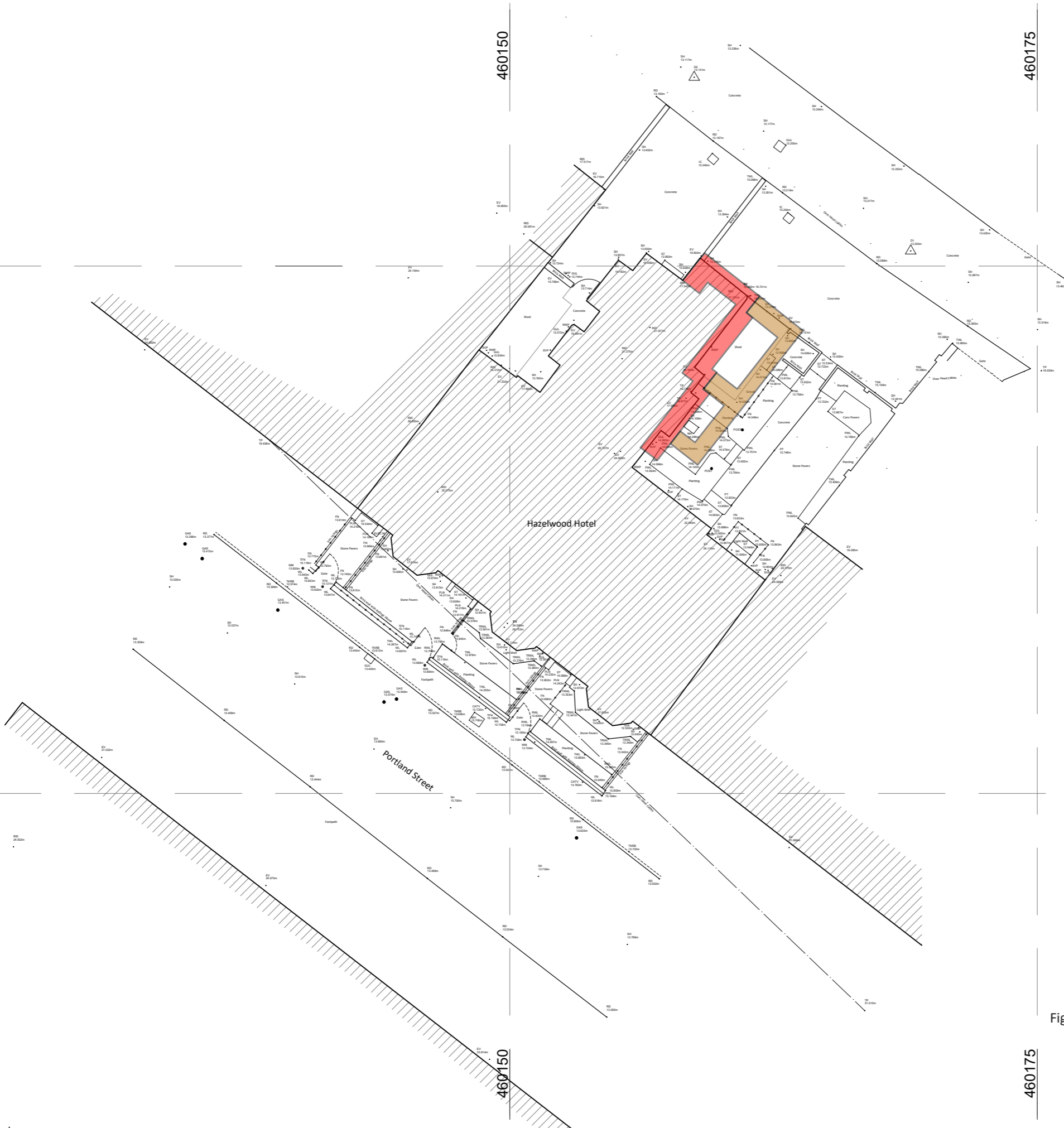
452475

452475

460125

460150

460175





-  Foundation trench for extension
-  Underpinning trench

Figure 2 Location of 2019 excavations overlaid on LHL Group topographic survey.

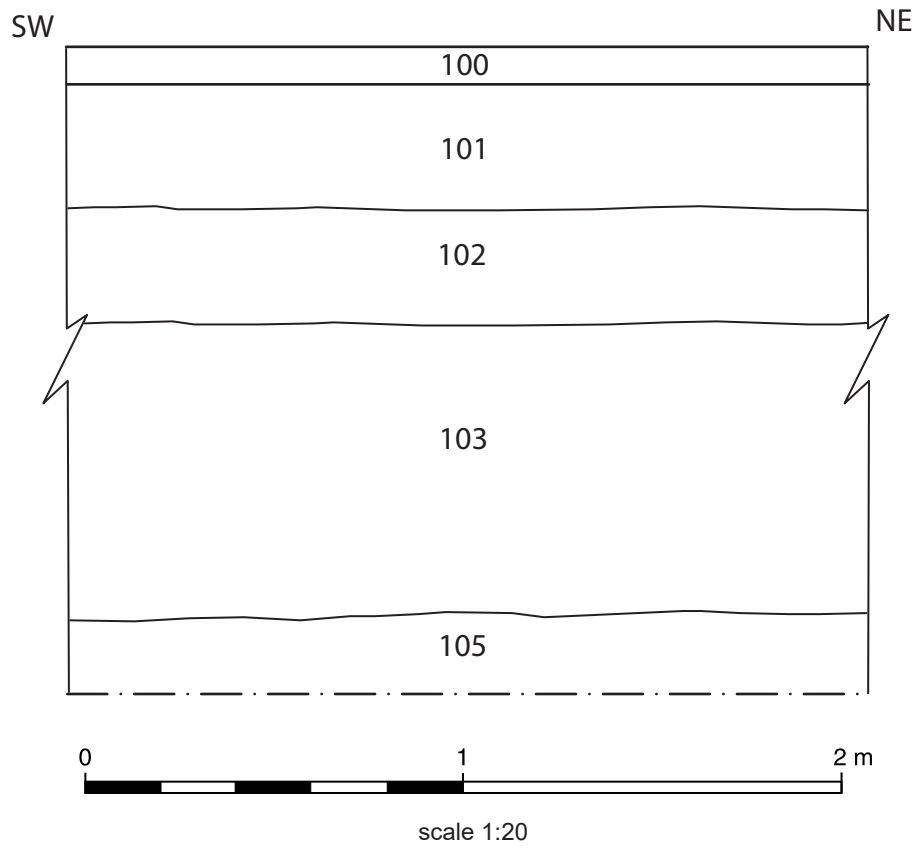


Figure 3 Representative section

APPENDIX 1 – INDEX TO ARCHIVE

Item	Number of items
Context sheets	N/A
Levels register	N/A
Photographic register	N/A
Sample register	N/A
Drawing register	N/A
Original drawings	1
B/W photographs (films/contact sheets)	N/A
Colour slides (films)	N/A
Digital photographs	61
Written Scheme of Investigation	N/A
Report	1

Table 2 Index to archive

APPENDIX 2 – CONTEXT LIST

Context Number	Description
100	Concrete surface
101	Make-up deposit
102	Make-up deposit
103	Horticultural/garden soil
104	Horticultural/garden soil
105	Layer

Table 3 Context list



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