

WATCHING BRIEF
AT
GEORGE ELIOT HOSPITAL
NUNEATON, WARWICKSHIRE

Tom Vaughan and Alan Jacobs

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Project 2744
Report 1357
EWA 7556

Archaeological watching brief at George Eliot Hospital, Nuneaton, Warwickshire

Tom Vaughan and Alan Jacobs

Background information

<i>Client</i>	NHS Estates Business Agency
<i>Site address</i>	George Eliot Hospital Education Centre, Eliot Way, Nuneaton, Warwickshire
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SP 3556 9047
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	EWA 7556
<i>Planning authority</i>	Nuneaton and Bedworth Council
<i>reference</i>	P99A0347
<i>Brief</i>	WCC MFS 2005
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2005
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999
<i>Previous archaeological work on the site</i>	

There has been no previous archaeological work undertaken on site.

Previous archaeological work on associated sites

The medieval settlement of Chilvers Coton is thought to have centred on Coton Arches, 1.5km to the north-west (MWA 9748). There is also documentary evidence of a possible deserted medieval village extending southwards to Gilfil Road, Hill Top, approximately 1.3km to the south-east (MWA 7444). Chilvers Coton was the centre of an important pottery industry from the 13th - 17th century (MWA 7350). The earliest were fine white wares; later came red sandy wares, then Midland Purple and Cistercian wares, and finally slip wares. The first kilns had two flues, although later techniques required three, four and even five flues by the late 15th century. Investigations either side of Heath End Road to the north-west have revealed 42 separate kilns in addition to large deposits of pottery, including wasters (misfired pottery), clay pits and other associated activity, over an area of approximately 600x270m. The closest sites were less than 0.3km to the west and comprised 13th to 15th activity (MWA 5049-5055; Mayes and Scott 1984, fig 4: sites 11-17).

The local clays were used to produce brick and tile in the 19th century in kilns located 0.6km to the south-west (MWA 5751 to 5753), while coal seams to the west and south-west were exploited as fuel for this and other industries (MWA 5750, 5754 and 7855).

Despite its modern appearance, there has been a hospital on the site for many years. A 'College for the Poor' was established on the south-west side of College Street, during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The building was rebuilt in 1809 and in 1836 came under the newly constituted Nuneaton Poor Law Union, as Nuneaton Union Workhouse (MWA 5755). An associated infirmary and laundry were built in 1905. The infirmary was converted into a Municipal Hospital in the 1930s, which is now the present George Eliot hospital. An iron foundry off Bull Ring and several lime kilns off Bridge Street existed to the north in the later 19th century (MWA 5756 and 5769). The nearby canal wharf off Bridge Street and Chilvers Coton Railway Station off Coventry Road were probably utilised in conjunction with these works (MWA 5768 and 5780).

Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

Methods

General specification for fieldwork	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	SMR Sources cited by the SMR 1903 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 Mayes and Scott 1984
Date(s) of fieldwork	18 th to 21 st July 2005
Area of site	c 1635m ²
Dimensions of stripped areas observed	length 32.5-48.5m width 23.5-27m depth 0-2.25m
Total area observed	c 1025m ²

Access to or visibility of structure

Observation of the excavated areas was undertaken during machine excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe structure and well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may not have been identified. In addition selected areas within the main strip totalling c 300m² were excavated under archaeological supervision to the surface of the natural matrix.

Statement of confidence

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

Deposit description

(see also Appendix 1)

The stratigraphy generally consisted of the modern tarmac car park surface and gravel hardcore levelling material [1001], directly over the natural matrix [1002]. The natural was a mixed clay with frequent sandy patches and inclusions of granite, sandstone and mudstone fragments. A number of modern electric and drainage service trenches were cut into the clay, to a maximum depth of c 1.30m. Occasional late 19th/early 20th century ceramic land drains were also noted to c 0.90m. Patches of dark brown slightly silty clay lay within the surface of the natural matrix [1003]. Occasional deep pockets of redeposited clay with occasional sandstone fragments, iron slag and dense patches of coal dust also lay within the natural matrix to an unknown depth [1005].

Finds analysis

The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of 14 sherds of pottery weighing 159g. In addition fragments of tile were recovered. The group came from a single stratified context and could be dated from the Roman period onwards (see Table 1). Level of preservation was generally fair with the majority of sherds displaying only moderate levels of abrasion.

Material	Total	Weight (g)
Roman pottery (fabric 13)	1	17
Medieval pottery (fabric SQ30)	3	64
Post-medieval pottery (MP)	11	131

Tile	3	13
Total	18	225

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

Discussion of the pottery

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 1). No diagnostic form sherds were present, and so sherds were datable by fabric type to their general period or production span. The discussion below is a summary of the finds and associated location or contexts by period. Where possible, *terminus post quem* dates have been allocated and the importance of individual finds commented upon as necessary.

Only a single much abraded fragment of Roman pottery was recovered from unstratified context 1000, in a fabric conforming to the description of fabric type 13 from the Lunt Excavations (Faiers forthcoming). Medieval sherds were also recovered, and these conformed to Chilvers Coton C ware (Mayes and Scott 1984) from the nearby kilns. Sherds dating from AD 1300-1500 were recovered from both unstratified context 1000 and also from a stratified context 1003.

Only one post-medieval fabric was represented, and this conformed to Chilvers Coton D ware (Mayes and Scott 1984). Sherds of this type were recovered from both unstratified context 1000 and stratified context 1003, and date from the 15th to the mid 17th century. The condition of these sherds would seem to indicate a high-fired post-medieval ware rather than an over-fired medieval fabric.

Ceramic building material

Fragments of medieval/post-medieval tile (fabric 2b; cf Hurst 1992) dating to the 13th-18th centuries were recovered from unstratified context 1000.

Discussion and conclusions

The patches of silty clay within the surface of the natural matrix are interpreted to represent relict subsoil, the rest of which was scoured off during construction of the car park in the latter part of the 20th century. It was not possible to accurately identify the grid of grouted boreholes, which cover the site. This was probably due to the frequently disturbed surface and the variable character of the natural matrix.

The pottery was recovered from a single stratified context, and was otherwise unstratified. None of the pottery was specifically identifiable as waster material from production, but clearly it includes material of local origin and so from the Chilvers Cotton kiln site, although the limited fabric descriptions available make comparison difficult. In conclusion, however, the small quantity of finds makes this assemblage of only limited archaeological interest.

No remains of archaeological significance were identified. It is unclear if the medieval pottery production previously recorded to the north-west originally continued into the present site. This is due to the earlier groundworks associated with the present car park, which involved substantial removal of soils and horizons down into the natural glacial clays.

Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of the NHS Estates Business Agency at George Eliot Hospital, Nuneaton, Warwickshire (NGR SP 3556 9047; SMR ref. EWA 7556). No archaeological features, structures or horizons were identified. Natural glacial clay was observed directly below the gravel hardcore associated with the modern tarmac surface. Small patches of relict soil were noted within the surface of the clay, which was frequently disturbed by modern services and larger areas of redeposited clay with coal dust and modern waste. A small quantity of pottery was recovered, comprising largely post-medieval sherds plus a few medieval and one Roman sherd. The area is considered to have been the subject of substantial groundworks associated with the construction of the present car park in the later 20th century, which involved the removal of all horizons down into the natural clay.

Archive

Fieldwork progress records AS2	4
Photographic records AS3	1
Digital photographs	40
Black and white photographs	34
Context number catalogue AS5	1
Drawings	1
Boxes of finds	1
Computer disks	1

The project archive is intended to be placed at:	Warwickshire Museum Market Hall Market Place Warwick, CV34 4SA
telephone	01926 412500 or 412501

Acknowledgements

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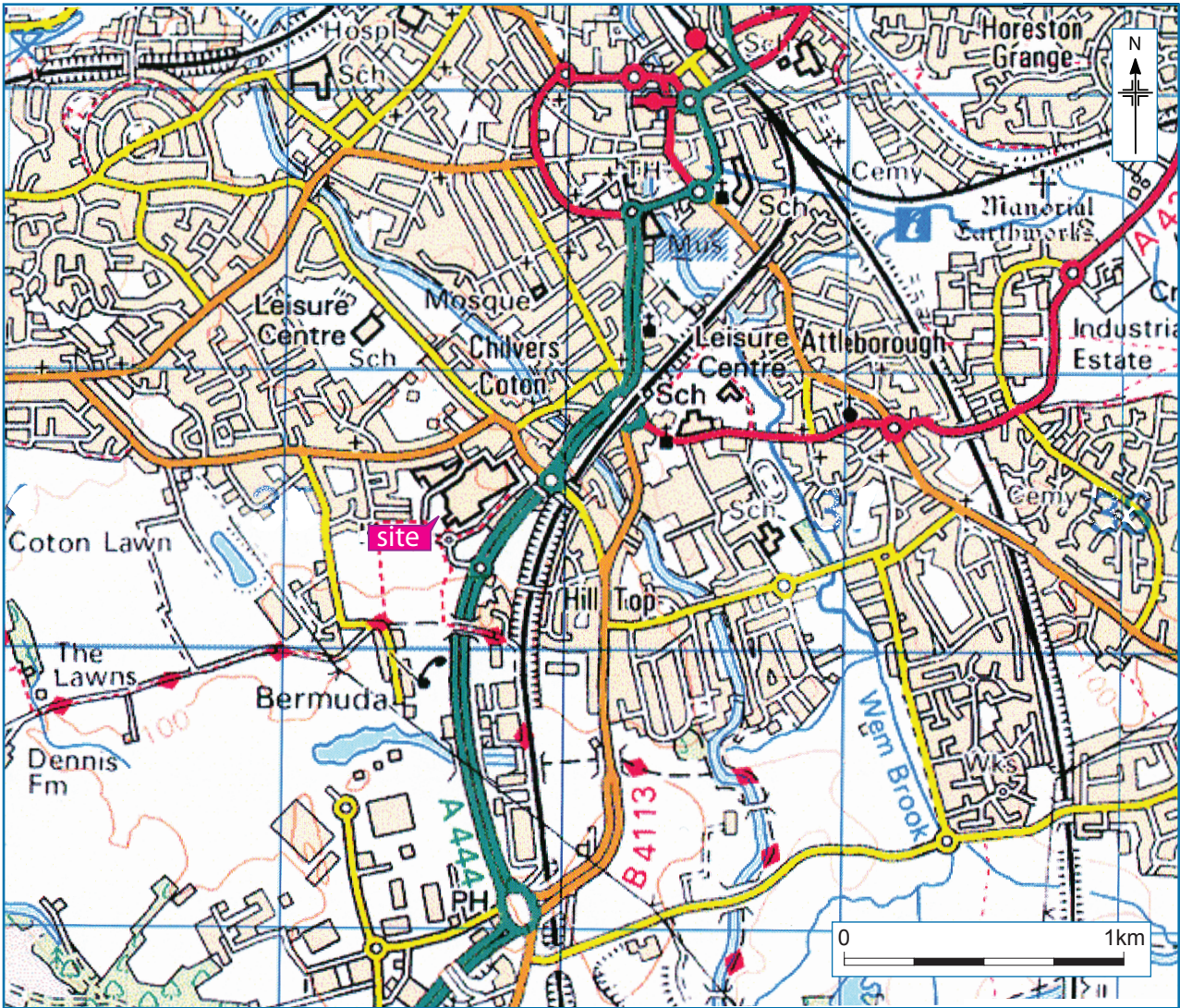
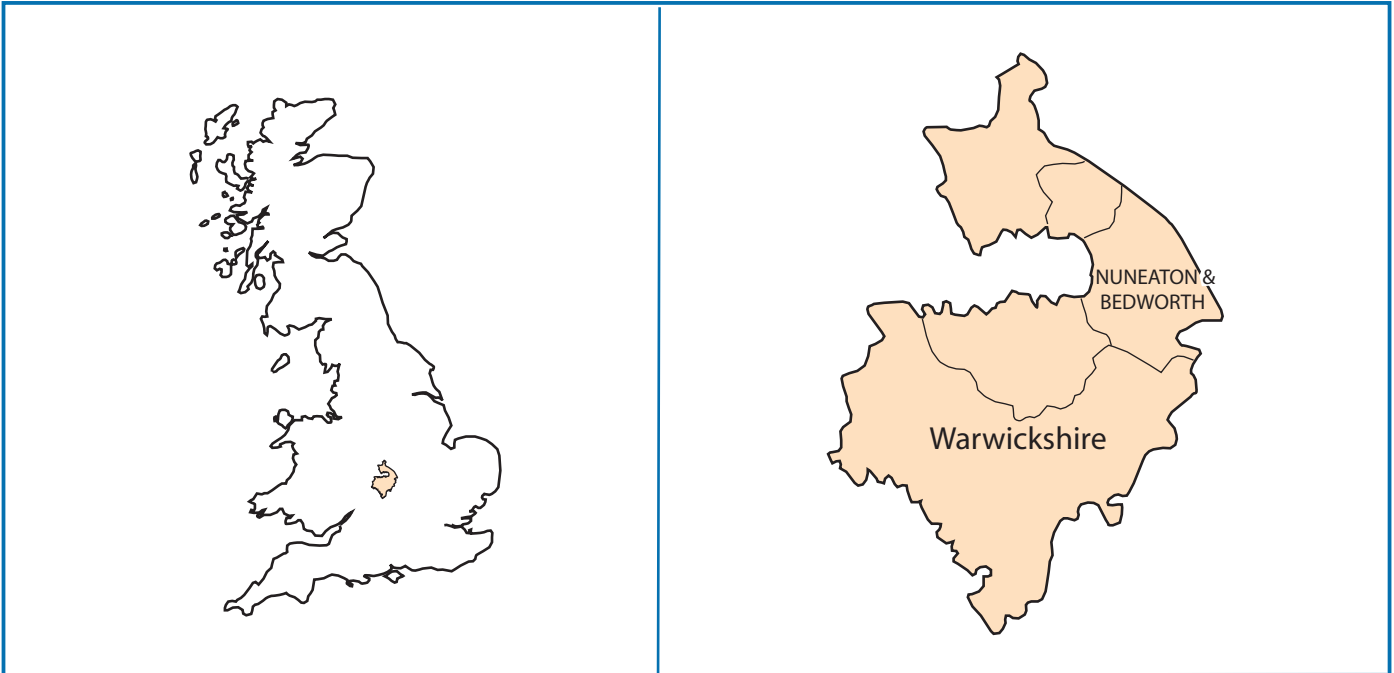
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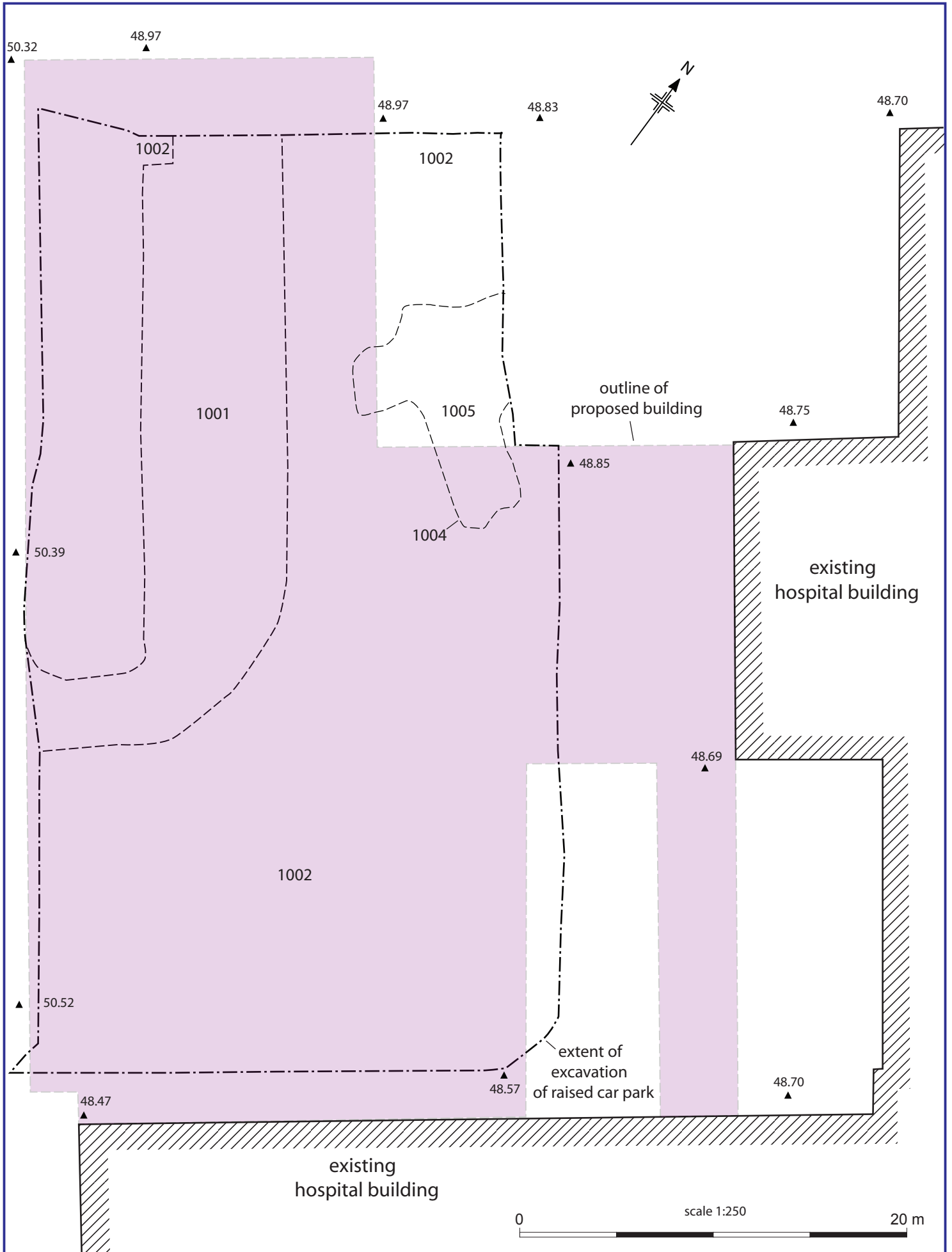
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Location of the site.

Figure 1



Site plan (levels in metres AOD).

Figure 2

Appendix 2 - Plates



Plate 1: Pre-excavation, view east-south-east



Plate 2: Excavation in progress, view north-west



Plate 3: Irregular patch of redeposited clay and coal dust [1005], view south-west



Plate 4: Sample section, view south-west

Appendix 1 - Deposit description

Context_Register

<i>Context_No</i>	<i>Context_type</i>	<i>Feature_type</i>	<i>Colour</i>	<i>Texture</i>	<i>Consistency</i>	<i>Fill_of_(1)</i>	<i>Primary_Fill</i>	<i>Notes</i>
1000	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0	unstratified + machine cut finds
1001	Layer	Modern Surface	Black	tarmac + gravel	Compact	0	0	tarmac car park over light grey, dark grey + pink/red sub-angular gravel hardcore; shallow turfed clayey silt on banks; seals 1002, c
1002	Layer	Natural	orangey brown	Clay	Compact	0	0	occ sand patches, light grey mottled patches, fawn/grey sand/mudstone frags, directly below 1001, c 0.35m+ bgs; occ services to

<i>Context_No</i>	<i>Context_type</i>	<i>Feature_type</i>	<i>Colour</i>	<i>Texture</i>	<i>Consistency</i>	<i>Fill_of_(1)</i>	<i>Primary_Fill</i>	<i>Notes</i>
1003	Layer	Subsoil	Dark Brown	Silty clay	Compact	0	0	occ patches overlying 1002, diffuse boundary, occ charcoal flecks + pot, max 0.35-0.80m bgs, relict subsoil?
1004	Cut	Modern Pit	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0	irregular sheer sides, sealed by 1001, unknown depth
1005	Fill	n/a	Grey black brown fawn	clay	Compact	1004	0	mixed redeposited clay with fawn/grey sandstone frags & coal dust patches