

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION AT
THE OLD COFFIN STORE,
OLDBURY ROAD,
TEWKESBURY,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

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Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Project 3111
Report 1558

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Archaeological evaluation at The Old Coffin Store, Oldbury Road, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire

Darren Miller, Laura Griffin, and Dennis Williams

Part 1: Project summary

This report describes the results of sample trenching, post-fieldwork analysis, and documentary research. The aim of the project was to establish the presence or absence of significant remains within 1m of existing surfaces. The site lay at the east end of a medieval and later tenement. It also lay in an area of Roman settlement and Neolithic/Bronze Age activity.

Two trenches were excavated inside the building, through surfaces of 19th century bricks and tiles. The earliest deposit was a garden soil containing 15th to 18th century pottery. This was sealed by made ground containing 19th or 20th century pottery. The latter deposits are thought to represent the replacement of an earlier substrate. They also contained residual Roman and medieval pottery. Other evidence suggests that the building was built in the 18th century, and formed part of a row of twelve cottages.

None of the deposits identified in the evaluation are thought to merit further investigation or preservation *in situ*. However, the results suggest that more significant deposits survive below the limit of excavation.

Part 2: Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Planning background

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at The Old Coffin Store on the corner of Oldbury Road and Eagle Alley in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire (NGR: SO 89420 32942; Fig 1), on behalf of Hercules Houses Ltd. The client intends to demolish the existing building and develop the site with a new three-storey building incorporating a shop and apartment and has submitted a planning application to Tewkesbury Borough Council (reference number as yet unassigned), who consider that archaeological remains may be affected.

1.2 Archaeological background

The site lay in the medieval town of Tewkesbury, at the east end of a standard tenement (Hannan 1981, map 46). It also lay in an area of Roman settlement and late Neolithic/Bronze Age activity (Hannan 1993). This much was clear from the results of previous fieldwork (Fig 1). However, it was also clear that remains of these periods had been truncated by later development. This had been demonstrated in evaluations to the north and west of the site, and was also implied by the density of buildings shown on 19th and 20th century maps (Fig 2).

1.3 Aims

The aim of the project was to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, and significance of any surviving archaeological remains. However, in this case, the evaluation was limited to deposits within 1m of the existing surface, this being the maximum depth of proposed development's groundworks.

1.4 Methods

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999).

The project also conforms to the standard brief prepared by Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service (GCC 2007) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2007).

1.4.1 Fieldwork

Two trenches, each measuring 1.5m square, were hand excavated to a maximum depth of c 1m, under the supervision of the Project Leader (Fig 2; Plate 1). Deposits were excavated stratigraphically, in reverse order to their deposition. All artefacts were recovered, except for small fragments of brick and tile. No deposits with significant potential for environmental analysis were encountered. Written, drawn, and photographic records were compiled according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). The trenches were backfilled with the excavated spoil.

1.4.2 Post-fieldwork analysis

Stratigraphic relationships recorded in the field were checked and Harris matrices were constructed for each trench. Some deposits and features were correlated on the basis of shared properties or characteristics.

All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended). All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* date produced for each stratified context. The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992; Hurst 1994).

1.4.3 **Documentary research**

Records relating to sites and finds in the area were obtained from the Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). Other sources were also consulted, including reports on previous fieldwork (Hannan 1993; Miller 2004; Patrick 2002), an archaeological survey of Tewkesbury (Hannan 1981), and volume 8 of the *Victoria County History of Gloucestershire* (Elrington 1968). These sources provided the information required to interpret and discuss the results of the fieldwork.

2. **Results**

2.1.1 **Phase 1: Garden soil**

The earliest deposit in both trenches was a firm greyish brown sandy silt with frequent inclusions of bone, charcoal, and ceramic (Fig 4; contexts 104 and 204; Plates 2 and 3). The latest pottery was of 18th century date, giving a *terminus post quem* or baseline date of deposition. The deposit also contained residual sherds of 15th and 17th/18th century pottery, along with fragments of clay tobacco pipe and building materials. Such soils are commonly found in historic towns, and are generally interpreted as the products of gardening, waste disposal, and natural processes.

2.1.2 **Phase 2: Made ground and surfaces**

In Trench 1, the Phase 1 garden soil was overlain by a discrete deposit of yellowish grey clay (Fig 4; context 103; Plate 2). This deposit was sealed by another that resembled the Phase 1 garden soil but had more frequent inclusions, including sherds of 19th/20th century pottery. Because of its date and stratigraphic position, this deposit can be interpreted as a substrate for The Old Coffin store. It was sealed by a surface made of quarry tiles set in ash (Fig 4; contexts 100 and 101; Plate 2).

In Trench 2, the deposits above the Phase 1 garden soil consisted of firm grey brown sandy silt overlain by greyish brown sandy silt, both with frequent charcoal and ceramics (Fig 4; contexts 202 and 203; Plate 3). These deposits can also be interpreted as made ground. The pottery included sherds of Roman, late medieval, and 17th/18th century date, but a *terminus post quem* was given by sherds of 19th/20th century date from the upper deposit. The surface above this deposit consisted of bricks set in ash and mortar (Fig 4; contexts 200 and 201; Plate 3).

2.2 **Artefacts, by Laura Griffin and Dennis Williams**

2.2.1 **Analysis**

A substantial assemblage totalling 450 artefacts weighing 21.49kg was retrieved from the site. The assemblage was of mixed date spanning from the Roman to modern periods. The finds were spot-dated and, in the case of those from stratified deposits, used to provide a *terminus post quem*.

Material	Total	Weight (g)
Roman pottery	1	4
Medieval pottery	14	237
Post-medieval pottery	83	1335
Modern pottery	19	116
Brick	2	3563
Coal	1	2
Glass	24	356
Iron	7	344
Clay pipe	73	253
Slag	2	116
Slate	1	32
Stone	15	1288
Tile	21	10998

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

Pottery formed the largest material group, totalling 111 sherds, weighing 1623g and accounting for 27% of the overall assemblage. The general condition of the sherds was very good with little evidence of abrasion. The majority of sherds could be dated to the medieval and post-medieval periods, although a single sherd of oxidised Severn Valley ware dating to the Roman period was identified as residual within context 203. All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 2). A small number of diagnostic form sherds were present and could be dated accordingly; the remaining sherds were datable by fabric type to their general period or production span. Where mentioned, all specific forms are referenced to the type series within the report for Deansway, Worcester (Bryant 2004).

Clay tobacco pipe formed the second largest material group accounting for 4% of the assemblage (contexts 102, 104, 202 and 204). The group included eight bowls, 64 stems and six stamps. All were of post-medieval date and a significant number were blackened or burnt.

Building material formed only a small proportion of the assemblage and included 13 pieces of roofing tile of a long-lived type, datable to between the 13th and 18th centuries (contexts 102, 104, 203 and 204), 5 pieces of large ceramic flag tiles (contexts 100 and 102) two bricks of modern date (contexts 200 and 202) and a small group of building stone including oolitic limestone and slate tiles (contexts 102, 104, 202 and 204).

A total of 24 shards of vessel glass were identified (contexts 102, 104, 202 and 203), all coming from bottles of post-medieval or modern date. Other finds included a single piece of highly vitrified brick (context 104), a small fragment of slag (context 202) and six iron objects of late medieval and modern date (contexts 102, 104 and 202).

2.2.2 Discussion

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.

Fabric no.	Fabric name	Total	Weight (g)
12	Severn Valley ware	1	4
69	Oxidized glazed Malvernian ware	12	194
75	North Devon gravel tempered ware	6	95
75.1	North Devon gravel-free ware	2	35
78	Post-medieval red wares	14	299
81	Stonewares	12	124
81.2	Westerwald stoneware	1	2
81.4	Miscellaneous late stoneware	6	215
81.8	Raeren stoneware	1	20
82	Tin-glazed ware	10	68
83	Porcelain	1	1
84	Creamware	3	8
85	Modern stone china	15	107
90	Post-medieval orange ware	16	254
91	Post-medieval buff wares	13	191
99	Miscellaneous medieval wares	2	43
100	Miscellaneous post-medieval wares	2	32

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric type

Roman

Material of this date consisted of a single, residual fragment of oxidised Severn Valley ware (fabric 12), which was retrieved from context 203 and could be dated to between the mid 1st and 4th centuries AD.

Medieval

A total of nine sherds of pottery were identified of medieval date, all of which were residual and highly abraded (contexts 104, 202, 203 and 204). Thirteen sherds were of oxidised glazed Malvernian ware (fabric 69; contexts 104, 203 and 204), a fabric type, which can be dated to between the 13th and 16th centuries. All were decorated with a characteristic speckled green glaze and one diagnostic sherd was present which could be identified as coming from a dripping dish of early 15th–16th century date (Deansway form 69.5).

The fabric types of the remaining two sherds were not identified and therefore these sherds were grouped as miscellaneous (fabric 99). One was a highly burnt fragment which was beyond recognition (context 202), whilst the other came from a flared bowl form and was of a fine, micaceous oxidised fabric with a yellowish brown glaze which is considered to have been produced locally (context 203).

In addition to the pottery, it is possible that some of the fragments of roof tile within the above contexts were also of medieval date, but due to the longevity of tile forms it is not possible to identify individual fragments.

Post-medieval

Three contexts (104, 203 and 204) could be allocated a *terminus post quem* of late post-medieval date on the basis of material found within them. Material ranged from the 16th–18th centuries in date and once more, was dominated by pottery.

A total of 82 sherds were identified as being of post-medieval date and comprised a range of fabrics ranging from commonly identified domestic wares to more unusual European imports which are likely to have reached Tewkesbury via the River Severn.

These imported wares included 10 sherds of tin glazed wares (fabric 82; contexts 102, 104, 202 and 203). All displayed blue painted decoration but appear to have come from different sources with those from context 203 having a slightly bluish tinge to the glaze, whilst those from context 102 had a definite pink hue.

Further imported sherds consisted of three fragments of stoneware from context 202. These included one sherd of Westerwald type (fabric 81.2; context 202), one of Raeren (fabric 81.8; context 202) and a further sherd of unknown provenance, but also likely to be of German manufacture and probably from a Bellarmine type vessel (context 202).

Other sherds thought to have reached the town via the river network were those of North Devon gravel-tempered ware (fabrics 75 and 75.1; contexts 102 and 202). This group consisted of sherds of both the heavily gravel-tempered and gravel-free types and included a highly distinctive sherd displaying sgraffito decoration. All could be dated to between the 17th and early 18th centuries.

Remaining pottery of this period consisted of a range of commonly identified domestic types and forms dating between the late 17th and 18th centuries. These included 14 sherds of post-medieval red wares (fabric 78; contexts 102, 104, 202 and 204), 16 sherds of post-medieval orange wares (fabric 90; contexts 202 and 203) and 13 of post-medieval buff wares (fabric 91; contexts 102, 202 and 203). Forms included a range of jars, cups and dishes decorated in a variety of ways including mottled glazes, inlaid slip and slip trailed patterns and the more standard dark brown/black glaze. In addition, 17 sherds of miscellaneous stonewares (fabric 81.4; contexts 102 and 202) and two sherds of unidentified fabric types (fabric 100; contexts 202 and 203) were also present and thought to be of a similar date range.

Ceramic building material from contexts of post-medieval date consisted of 12 fragments of flat roof tile (contexts 104, 203 and 204), but as explained above, a number of these are possibly residual and of medieval date. In addition, 5 fragments of building stone were also identified within the same contexts

All clay pipe is likely to date to the post-medieval period. The group included six stamped pieces but unfortunately the majority were illegible. Those that could be read included one bearing the initials IB, one with ?JC and two stamped with 'JOHN -----'. In addition, three shards of bottle glass could also be dated to this period (contexts 104 and 203).

Modern

Two contexts (102 and 202) had a *terminus post quem* of 20th century based on the material recovered from them. Pottery consisted of 15 sherds of modern stone china (fabric 85; contexts 102 and 202), three sherds of creamware (fabric 84; context 202) and one sherd of porcelain (fabric 83; context 202).

Other finds of modern date included brick fragments (contexts 200 and 202), pieces of a large ceramic floor tile (context 202), bottle glass (contexts 102 and 202) and various fragments of iron objects including nails (contexts 102 and 202).

2.2.3 Significance

The main significance of this assemblage is the presence of imported pottery types, which are generally only seen in this region on sites in close proximity to the River Severn.

3. **Synthesis**

3.1 **Roman activity**

The sherd of Roman pottery from Trench 2 indicates some kind of activity during this period, and implies the presence of contemporary deposits below or beyond the limit of excavation. However, given that no Roman pottery was found in deeper excavations to the south-west (Fig 1; 21559), it is unlikely that the site was a focus of activity in this period.

3.2 **Medieval and post-medieval gardening**

The earliest deposits suggest that the east end of the tenement was used for gardening and waste disposal between the 15th and 18th centuries. This type of land-use has been attested by countless excavations in similar contexts, and is in no way remarkable. The lack of earlier medieval pottery may be significant, given that the tenement was probably laid out in the 12th or 13th century (Hannan 1981, 91). If this was the case, the tenement may have been used less intensively in this period. However, it is more likely that the lack of early medieval pottery reflects the limited depth of excavation.

3.3 **Residential and commercial development**

All the other deposits relate to The Old Coffin Store itself. They are unlikely to relate to the construction of the building, as it was already standing by 1880, and appeared to contain 18th century fabric (Fig 2; Plate 4). Rather, the deposits probably represent the replacement of an existing substrate. Judging by the cartographic and architectural evidence, it is likely that The Old Coffin Store represents the conversion of two 18th century cottages, the first two in a row of twelve that extended westwards from Oldbury Road (Fig 2).

4. **Significance**

None of the deposits identified in the evaluation are thought to merit further investigation or preservation *in situ*. They are of some local significance, as evidence for undocumented medieval and later activity, but such deposits are typical in historic towns, and are well attested elsewhere in Tewkesbury. However, the results of the evaluation suggest that more significant deposits may survive below the limit of excavation. In particular, the residual sherds of Roman and medieval pottery indicate deposits or at least other artefacts of these periods.

5. **Publication summary**

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, and unless directed otherwise, the Service intends to publish the following summary in appropriate local and/or regional journals.

In July 2007, the Worcestershire Archaeology Service undertook an archaeological evaluation at the Old Coffin Store, Oldbury Street, Tewkesbury (NGR SO 89420 32942). The aim of the project was to establish the presence or absence of significant remains within 1m of the existing ground surface. The site lay at the east end of a medieval and later tenement. It also lay in an area of Roman settlement and Neolithic/Bronze Age activity.

Two trenches were excavated inside the building, through surfaces of 19th century bricks and tiles. The earliest deposit was a garden soil containing 15th to 18th century pottery. This was sealed by made ground containing 19th or 20th century pottery. The latter deposits are thought to represent the replacement of an earlier substrate. They also contained residual Roman and medieval pottery, indicating more significant deposits below the limit of

excavation. Other evidence suggests that the building was built in the 18th century, and formed part of a row of twelve cottages.

6. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project: Sue Taylor (Hercules Homes Ltd) and Tim Grubb (Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service).

7. **Personnel**

The report preparation was led by Darren Miller. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan. Fieldwork was undertaken by Adam Lee, finds analysis by Dennis Williams and Laura Griffin, and illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

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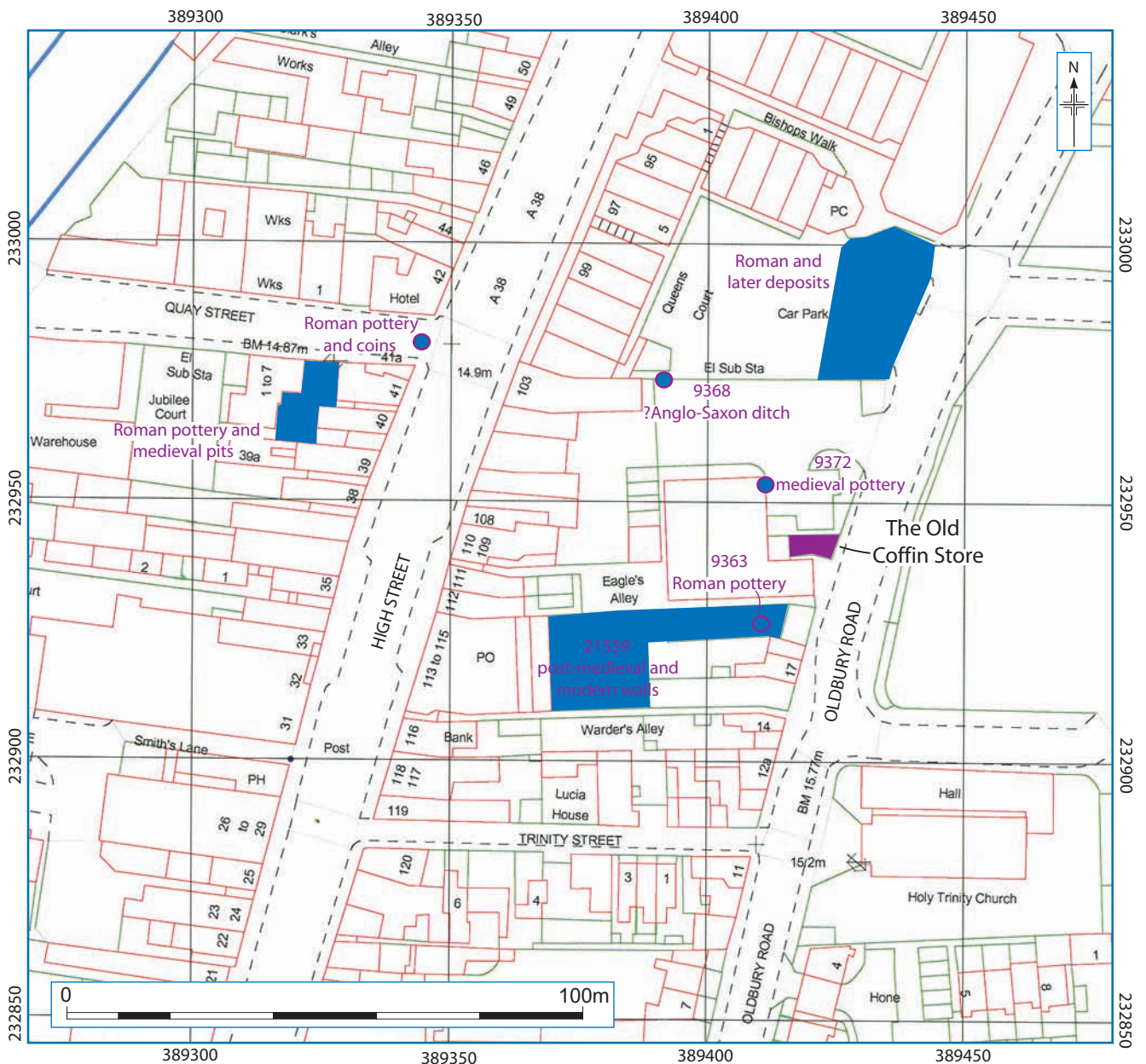
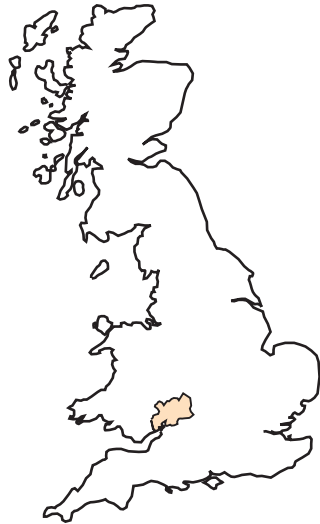
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Figures



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Location of the site, and sites in the vicinity

Figure 1

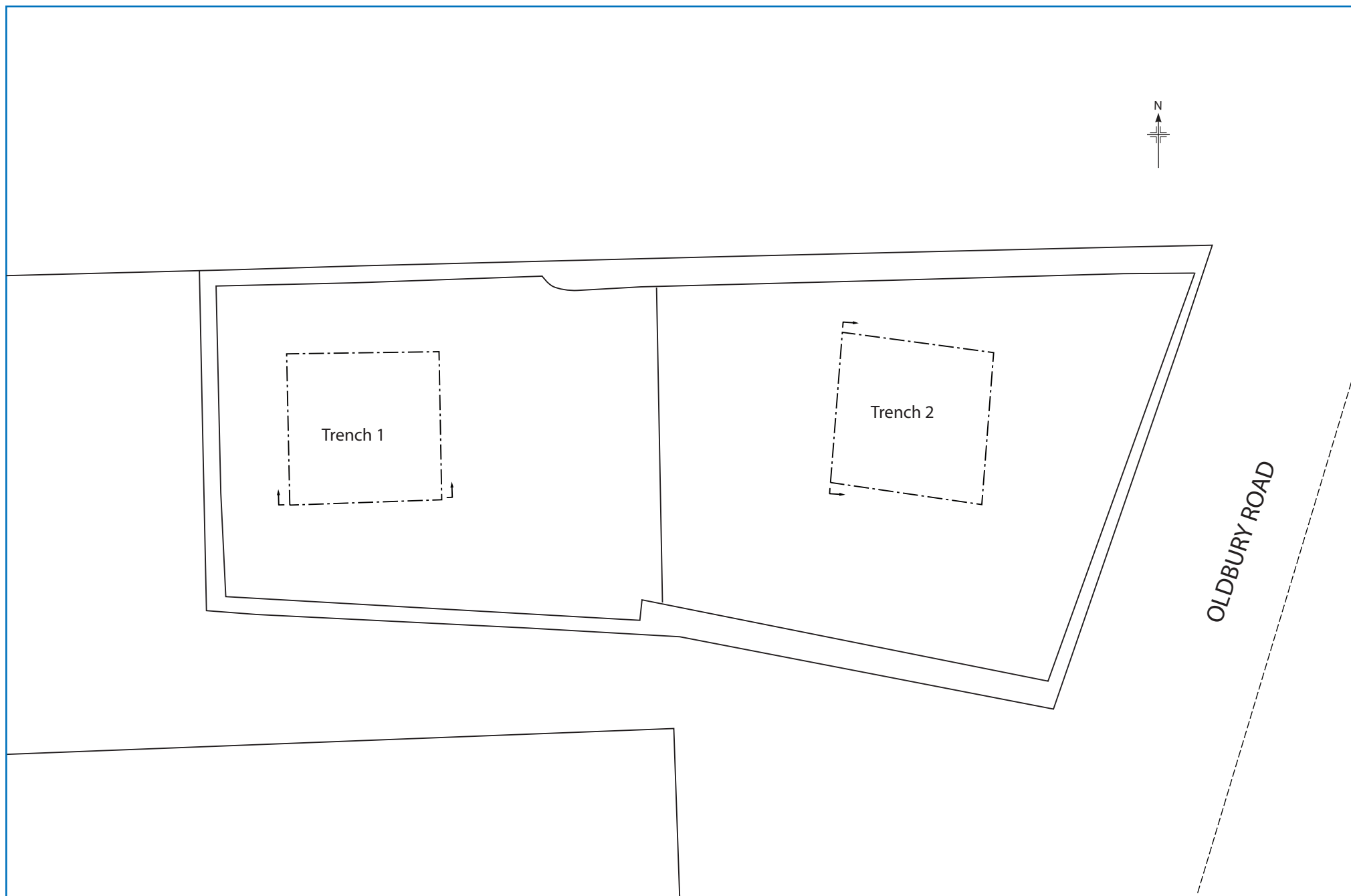


1880

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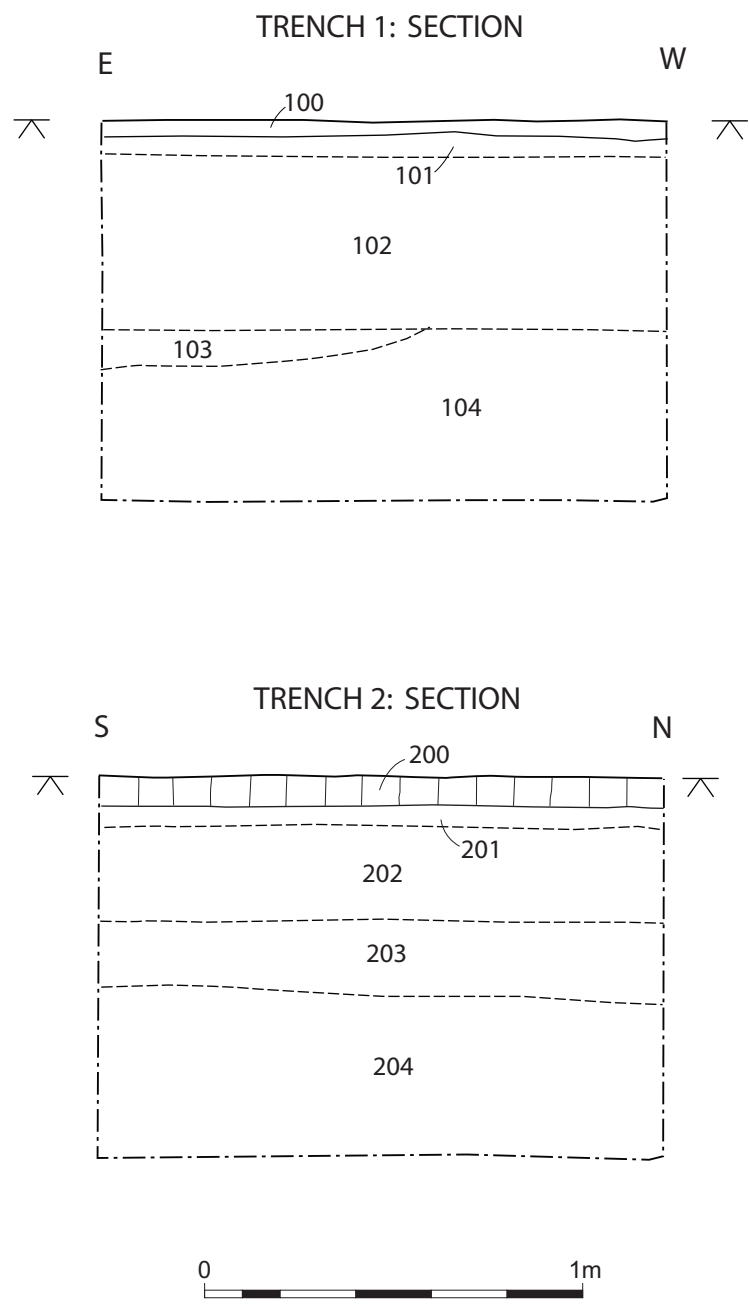
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Extract from first edition map Figure 2



Trench location plan

Figure 3



Sections

Figure 4

Photographs



Plate 1: General view, facing east onto Oldbury Road



Plate 2: Trench 1, south facing section



Plate 3: Trench 2, east facing section



Plate 4: Roof timbers, window, and brickwork

Appendix 1: Stratigraphy

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 1.50m Width: 1.50m Depth: 1.00m

Main deposits and features

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface
100	Surface	Tiles laid on bed and bonded with mortar	0-0.05m
101	Bedding layer	Black ash	0.05-0.10m
102	Made ground	Firm dark greyish brown sandy silt with frequent ceramic, bone, and charcoal inclusions	0.10-0.47m
103	Made ground	Firm light yellowish grey clay with darker aggregates	0.47-0.55m
104	Garden soil	Firm dark greyish brown sandy silt with frequent ceramic, bone, and charcoal inclusions	0.55-1.00m

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 1.50m Width: 1.50m Depth: 1.00m

Main deposits and features

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface
200	Surface	Bricks laid on bed and bonded with mortar	0-0.10m
201	Bedding layer	Black ash and mortar	0.10-0.16m
202	Made ground	Firm mid greyish brown sandy silt with frequent ceramic, bone, and charcoal inclusions	0.16-0.40m
203	Made ground	Firm mid yellowish brown sandy silt with frequent ceramic, bone, and charcoal inclusions, and occasional small aggregates of yellow clay	0.40-0.55m
204	Garden soil	Firm dark greyish brown sandy silt with moderate bone, charcoal, and ceramic inclusions.	0.55m-1.00m

Appendix 2: The archive

The archive consists of:

- 2 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 2 Site drawing sheets AS34
- 1 Trench record sheet AS41
- 1 Cdrom

The archive is intended to be placed at:

Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum
Clarence Street
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL50 3JT

Tel. Cheltenham (01242) 237431
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