

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF  
AT  
COLD ASTON PRIMARY SCHOOL,  
COLD ASTON,  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Tom Vaughan

With contributions by Angus Crawford

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

10<sup>th</sup> January 2008

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Project 3129  
Report 1572



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# **Archaeological watching brief at Cold Aston Primary School, Cold Aston, Gloucestershire**

**Tom Vaughan**

**With contributions by Angus Crawford**

## **Part 1 Project summary**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Cold Aston Primary School, Cold Aston, Gloucestershire (NGR: SP 127 198). It was undertaken on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council Corporate Building Services, who intends to install a new drainage system. The project aimed to determine if any significant archaeological site was present and if so to indicate its date, nature and location.

Three trenches were observed to the north and west of the school buildings, towards the boundary wall with St Andrew's Church. A deep silty clay topsoil and subsoil sequence was recorded, overlying the natural matrix of limestone brash and bedrock at approximately 1.50m below the present ground surface. A small number of unabraded Late Saxon/early medieval Cotswold unglazed ware pottery sherds were recovered from the subsoil. No features of Saxon or medieval date were identified however. Although lying directly adjacent to the medieval (and probably earlier) manor house, the site is conjectured to have remained open and undeveloped through this period.

A limestone wall was observed, toward the north side of the site, with a small area of cobbling adjacent. The wall is considered to be part of the structure that is visible as a scar on the building façade along the north boundary of the site. This was a toilet block, probably built as part of the original construction of the school in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, and demolished in the mid 1990s. Although the cobbled surface and wall appear contemporary from the stratigraphy, their exact relationship was indeterminate, due to modern truncation.



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## Part 2 Detailed report

### 1. Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Cold Aston Primary School, Cold Aston, Gloucestershire (NGR: SP 127 198; Fig 1), on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council Corporate Building Services. The client intends to install a new drainage system. The development is considered by Charles Parry (Gloucestershire County Council Senior Archaeological Officer) to have the potential to affect archaeological remains.

#### 1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999).

The project also conforms to the standard Gloucestershire County Council brief (GCC 2007), an email from Charles Parry (dated 4<sup>th</sup> December 2006) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2007b).

#### 1.3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to from proposal/brief - locate archaeological deposits and determine, if present, their extent, state of preservation, date, type, vulnerability and documentation.

### 2. Methods

#### 2.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record (GSMR). In addition to the sources listed in the bibliography the following were also consulted at Gloucestershire Archives (GA):

##### *Cartographic sources*

- 1795, Enclosure Plan, 9 chains: 1 mile, GA PC1871
- 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey, 1884, Gloucestershire sheet XXVIII.SE, scale 25": 1 mile
- 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey, 1888, Gloucestershire sheet, scale 6": 1 mile
- 1902 Ordnance Survey, Gloucestershire sheet, scale 25": 1 mile
- 1903 Ordnance Survey, Gloucestershire sheet XXVIII.SE, scale 6": 1 mile
- 1922 Ordnance Survey, Gloucestershire sheet XXVIII.SE, scale 25": 1 mile
- 1924 Ordnance Survey, Gloucestershire sheet, scale 6": 1 mile

## 2.2 **Fieldwork methodology**

### 2.2.1 **Fieldwork strategy**

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2007).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 13<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> August 2007.

Observation was restricted to those areas of groundworks associated with the development. Three trenches were excavated, using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothed bucket (Fig 2). Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were investigated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). In the event no deposits were identified which were determined to be suitable for environmental analysis.

### 2.2.2 **Structural analysis**

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

## 2.3 **Artefact methodology, by Angus Crawford**

### 2.3.1 **Artefact recovery policy**

All artefacts from the area of the watching brief were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).

### 2.3.2 **Method of analysis**

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated.

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).

## 2.4 **The methods in retrospect**

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

## 3. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The site comprises the north west side of Cold Aston Primary School, located on the north west side of the village of the same name. This portion of the schoolyard is under tarmac. It is bounded by St Andrew's church graveyard to the north, the school buildings to the east, and access to the south and west.

The earliest available cartographic source dates from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This depicts a T-shaped building on the site, aligned north-north-east to south-south-west with a short wing to the west. It lies immediately on the road frontage, and the plot boundaries differ from that in subsequent maps. Sources from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century reveal the site to be occupied by three conjoining limestone buildings set back from the south frontage, with a water pump immediately to the rear of the westernmost, surrounded by a



schoolyard, which is subdivided to the north. The schoolyard is no longer subdivided and the buildings have been extended substantially with two north-south wings at either end (Plate 1). A toilet block formerly lay along the north perimeter of the grounds, butting a building to the north, which still portrays the outline on the façade (Plate 8).

The village of Cold Aston, also known as Aston Blank, is at the centre of rural parish, on the eastern side of the Cotswolds Hills at approximately 200m AOD. The predominant soils the site and much of the surrounding upland area belongs to the Sherborne Soil Association (343d) comprising shallow well drained brashy calcareous clayey soils over limestone, associated with slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils. The parent material is Jurassic limestone and clay (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

The earliest reference is in 740, concerning a grant of land in the then coupled estates of (Cold) Aston and Notgrove by Ethelbald, king of Mercia, to Osred, a member of the Hwiccan royal family. It was at this time referred to simply as Aston, possibly to indicate its location to the east of Notgrove. By the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century it was commonly recorded as Cold Aston, said to derive from its bleak situation. Later in the medieval period it was sometimes called Great Aston to distinguish it from the hamlet of Little Aston. In the late medieval it was a separate manor. The name Aston Pipard is recorded in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, incorporating that of the then principal landowners. From the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century it became Aston Blank, possibly in reference to the land's bareness (VCH IX, 9-20).

The village was focussed on the green, which lay to the south-east of the present site. The medieval manor house lay adjacent to the school, to the south-east. It was rebuilt in the 1820s as the present Manor Farm House. The school and schoolhouse were built in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century by H. T. Hope, then lord of the manor (*ibid*).

St Andrew's church, due north of the study area, is a Grade I listed building, which incorporates Late Saxon, Norman and 13<sup>th</sup> century architectural elements, although it was repaired and widened through the 19<sup>th</sup> century (GSMR 8127). It may originally have been dedicated to St Mary in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, but had received its present dedication by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Earthworks of linear banks in fields to the south of the site indicate an area of possible deserted settlement, suggesting that the village has contracted in size at some point in the medieval or early post-medieval. One building is shown on the Enclosure plan of 1795 in this plot. Possible traces of ridge and furrow (the physical remains of the medieval practice of strip farming within large communally held fields) survive in fields further south, which attest to the importance of agriculture to the local economy (GSMR 9486). A number of sheepwashes exist around the village (GSMR 16271 and 16272), which indicate the pastoral nature of economy in the post-medieval period.

Evidence of further medieval activity has been identified to the east of the present village: in a field called *Coneygres*, where a ditched mound survived until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century (GSMR 2598). Aerial photographs show that it was associated with a number of other features, including a pond and dam of unknown function to the south-east (GSMR 2599), and gravel or quarry works. To the north lies a hollow way, which has been proposed as an earlier line of the modern road.

Although the village lies close to the Fosse Way, an ancient pre-Roman trackway, there is no firm evidence for settlement activity pre-dating the early medieval period in the vicinity. An stone feature with two oval openings in the perimeter wall of Spring Cottage at the south end of the Cold Aston is conjectured to be a two-seater lavatory stone of Roman date, although this is unconfirmed (GSMR 28148).

A small number of archaeological investigations have been carried out around the village in recent years:

In 2002 the groundworks associated with the construction of an extension at the school were monitored. These comprised a foundation trench to *c* 1m depth and general ground reduction within the new building to 0.5m depth. The natural matrix, comprising limestone brash was noted at the full depth of excavation, overlain by disturbed/degraded limestone brash. Features exposed included an undated wall and concrete footings at *c* 0.5m below ground level and an undated well at *c* 0.3m (GSMR 21890).

In 1998 a similar monitoring project was undertaken of the development at Church Cottage, to the west of the site. No significant archaeological remains were identified, although the full extent of the groundworks observed is unclear (GSMR 20333).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

#### 4.1.1 Phase 1 Natural deposits

The natural matrix comprised fragmented light yellowish cream limestone bedrock and brash. It was only observed within the deeper trench, Trench 1, at a depth of approximately 1.50m (105). In Trenches 1 and 2 it was overlain by a thick mid greyish-brown and orangey brown silty clay subsoil, with frequent limestone fragments and blocks and occasional modern debris (104 and 203). In Trenches 2 and 3 a relict topsoil was distinguishable, comprising a dark brown silty clay frequent small angular limestone fragments (202 and 302). These latter soils were noted to contain small charcoal flecks and lenses of ash.

#### 4.1.2 Phase 2 Late Saxon/early medieval

The aforementioned deep and thick subsoil (104) toward the north-west corner of the site, was found to contain a small amount of Late Saxon/early medieval pottery (Section 4.2.1 below). It lay directly over the natural limestone brash (105) and appeared to be the same as subsoil (203) to the east, although no dateable material was recovered from the latter.

No other features, structures, layers or horizons of this date were identified.

#### 4.1.3 Phase 3 Post-medieval/modern deposits

Subsoil (104) was sealed by a mid-light greyish-brown silty clay layer (103), with occasional limestone frags and a single post-medieval sherd (Section 4.2.2 below). It appeared to be the same as layers (202) and (302) to the east and south respectively, although these were darker and contained charcoal and lenses of ash. (202) contained modern brick (Section 4.2.3 below). They are considered to represent relict topsoil deposits, and as such might be expected to be disturbed and contain residual material.

A small patch of cobbles, (207) was noted, overlying (202), toward the north side of the site, continuing northwards into the trench baulk. Although intrinsically undated, it was dateable stratigraphically, as it overlay relict topsoil (202) and was sealed by the modern hardcore layer (201) for the existing play ground surface (200).

To the immediate east a limestone wall was (208) was recorded, aligned west-north-west to east-south-east, with a return to the north at the west end, continuing under the north baulk. The associated foundation trench (209) was cut through soils (202) and (203), and sealed by hardcore (201).

Unfortunately, although the floor surface (207) and the stonewall (208) appear from the stratigraphy to be contemporary, their exact relationship is indeterminate, as the trench was bisected at this point by a modern drainage trench (204).

## 4.2 Artefact analysis, by Angus Crawford

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of five sherds of pottery weighing 130g. In addition, animal bones and a fragment of brick were also recovered. The group came from three stratified contexts and could be dated from the late Saxon/early medieval to post-medieval period (see Table 1).

Context	Material	Type	Total	Weight (g)
103	Bone	Animal	2	26
103	Pottery	Post-medieval	1	14
104	Bone	Animal	3	116
104	Pottery	Saxon/medieval	4	116
202	Ceramic building material	Brick	1	140

**Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage**

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 2). A single diagnostic form sherd was present and could be dated accordingly, while 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).

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.

Context	Fabric	Fabric common name	Total	Weight (g)
103	90	Post-medieval orange ware	1	14
104	57.1	Cotswolds unglazed ware	4	116

**Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric**

### 4.2.1 Late Saxon/early medieval

Four sherds of Cotswold unglazed ware (fabric 57.1; context 104) were identified to this period. While three of the four sherds were fragmentary sherds of rims, they were undiagnostic and could only be dated to the fabric's general production span from late 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The fourth sherd was a rim and body profile with a thick everted rim, similar to the Deansway type 57.1.15 cooking pot of late 11<sup>th</sup> to early 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### 4.2.2 Post-medieval

Only one sherd of post-medieval pottery was identified within the assemblage. This was a body sherd of post-medieval orange ware (fabric 90; context 103) most probably dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### 4.2.3 Other finds

The remaining finds within the assemblage consisted of undated animal bones (context 103 and 104) and a fragment of brick dating from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century (context 202).

## 5. **Synthesis**

The lack of archaeological structures, features, deposits and horizons predating the post-medieval period coupled with the depth of soils, indicates that no significant activity was undertaken within the site. However, the presence of well-preserved Cotswold unglazed ware indicates the presence of late Saxon or early medieval settlement in the immediate vicinity. This accords with the documentary sources, which identify the existence of the manor of Aston from at least AD 740. The medieval manor house lay directly to the south-east of the present site. It may be argued that the Saxon antecedent probably occupied the same location, while the site itself remained as open ground, whether cultivated, barren or as a yard throughout the period.

The stone wall observed in Trench 2 to the north of the site aligns with the scar visible on the building façade along the north boundary and with the dashed line on Roberts Gardner Architects plan denoted as ‘approx location of former toilets’, a building which was demolished in the mid 1990s during an earlier redevelopment of the school and grounds. It appears to be the same building depicted on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888, which was probably built during the original construction of the school in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. A small area of cobbling was noted west of the wall. Unfortunately although the cobbled surface and wall appear contemporary from the stratigraphy, their exact relationship was indeterminate, due to the presence of a modern drainage trench, which had truncated the point of intersection.

No other features, layers, deposits or horizons, nor significant archaeological artefacts, were identified.

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## 6. 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 Gloucestershire County Council Corporate Building Services at Cold Aston primary School, Cold Aston, Gloucestershire (NGR: SP 127 198). Three trenches were observed to the north and west of the school buildings, towards the boundary wall with St Andrew's Church. A deep silty clay topsoil and subsoil sequence was recorded, overlying the natural matrix of limestone brash and bedrock at approximately 1.50m below the present ground surface. A small number of unabraded Late Saxon/early medieval Cotswold unglazed ware pottery sherds were recovered from the subsoil. No features of Saxon or medieval date were identified however. Although lying directly adjacent to the medieval (and probably earlier) manor house, the site is conjectured to have remained open and undeveloped through this period.*

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## 7. Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project: John Goulter (Corporate Building Services, Gloucestershire County Council) Richard MacDonald (Roberts Gardner Ltd) and Charles Parry (Senior Archaeological Officer, Gloucestershire County Council).

## 8. Personnel

The report was prepared by Tom Vaughan, from the field records by Dennis Williams and Andrew Mann. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers. Finds analysis was undertaken by Angus Crawford; illustration by Carolyn Hunt and Tom Vaughan.

## 9. Bibliography

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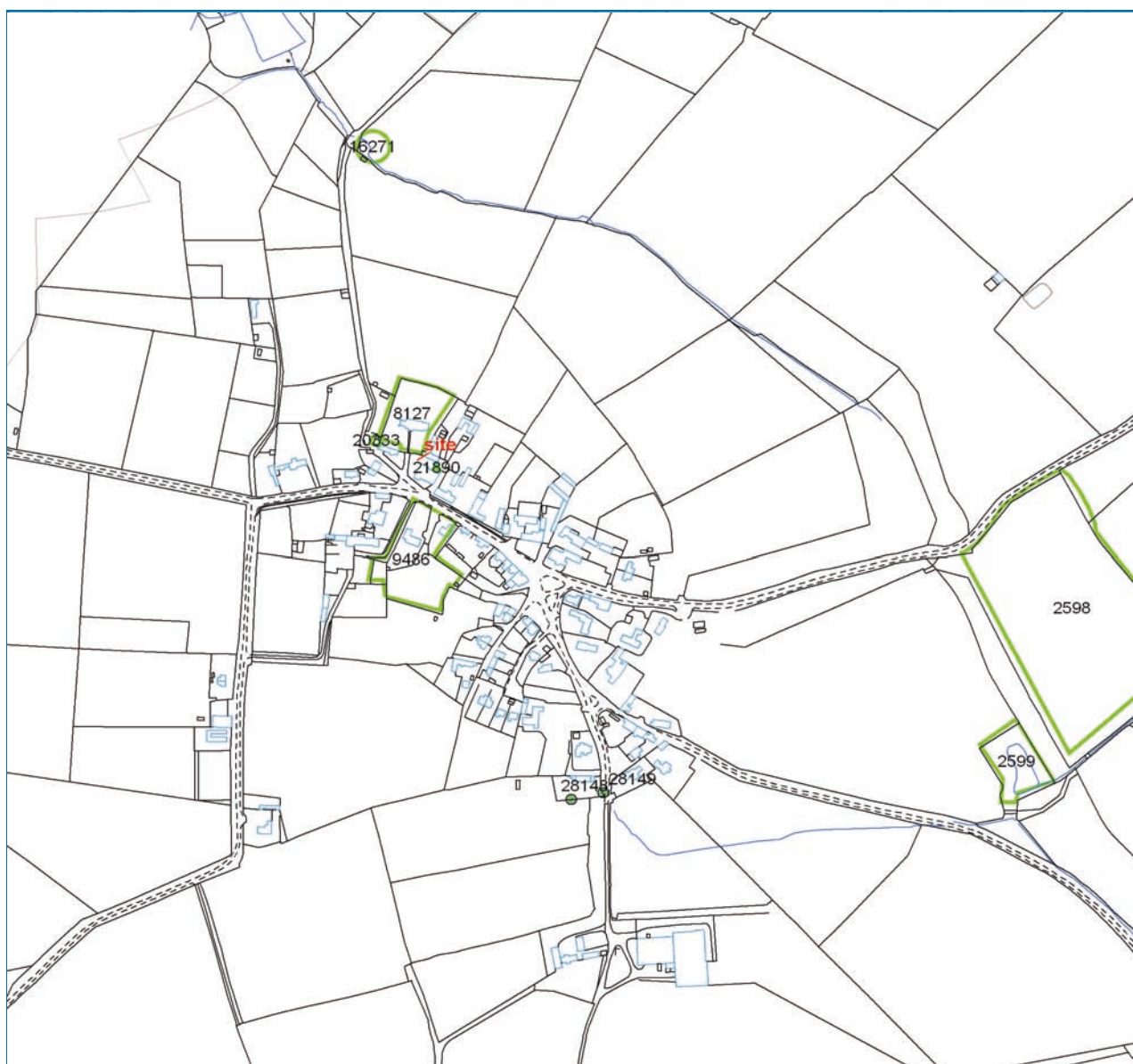
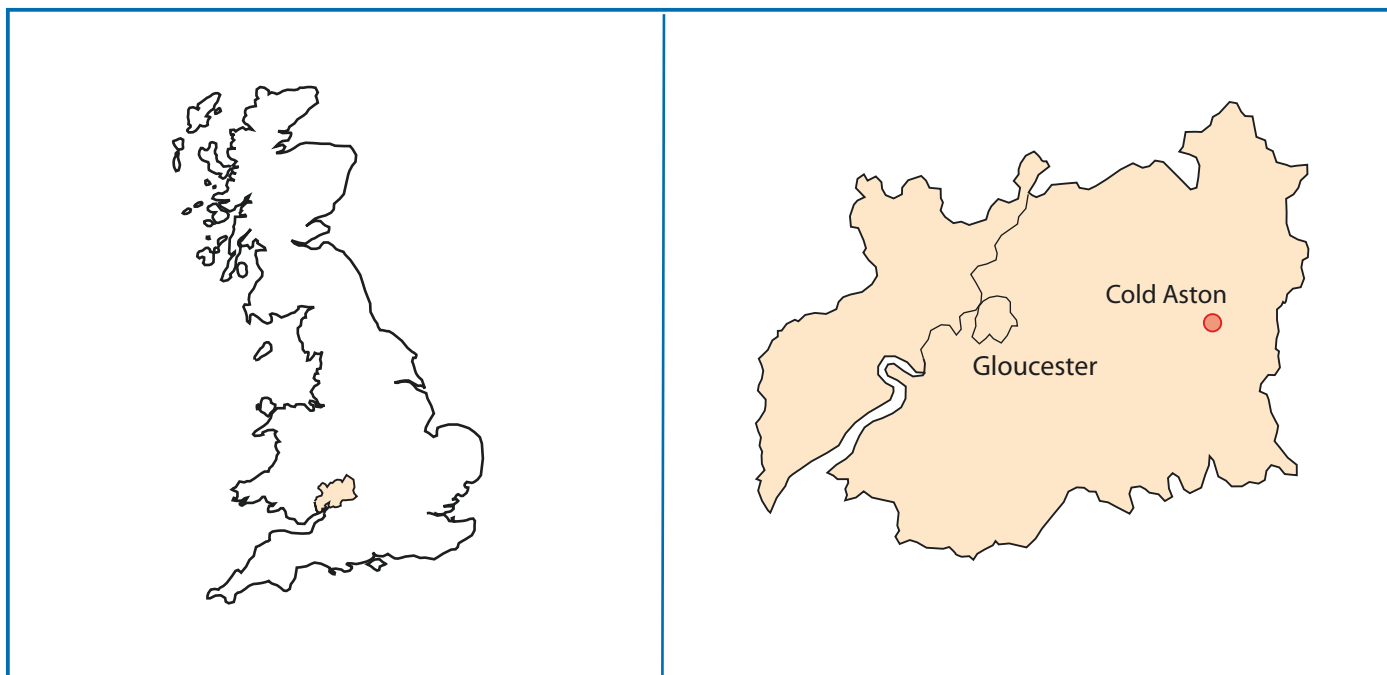
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# Figures

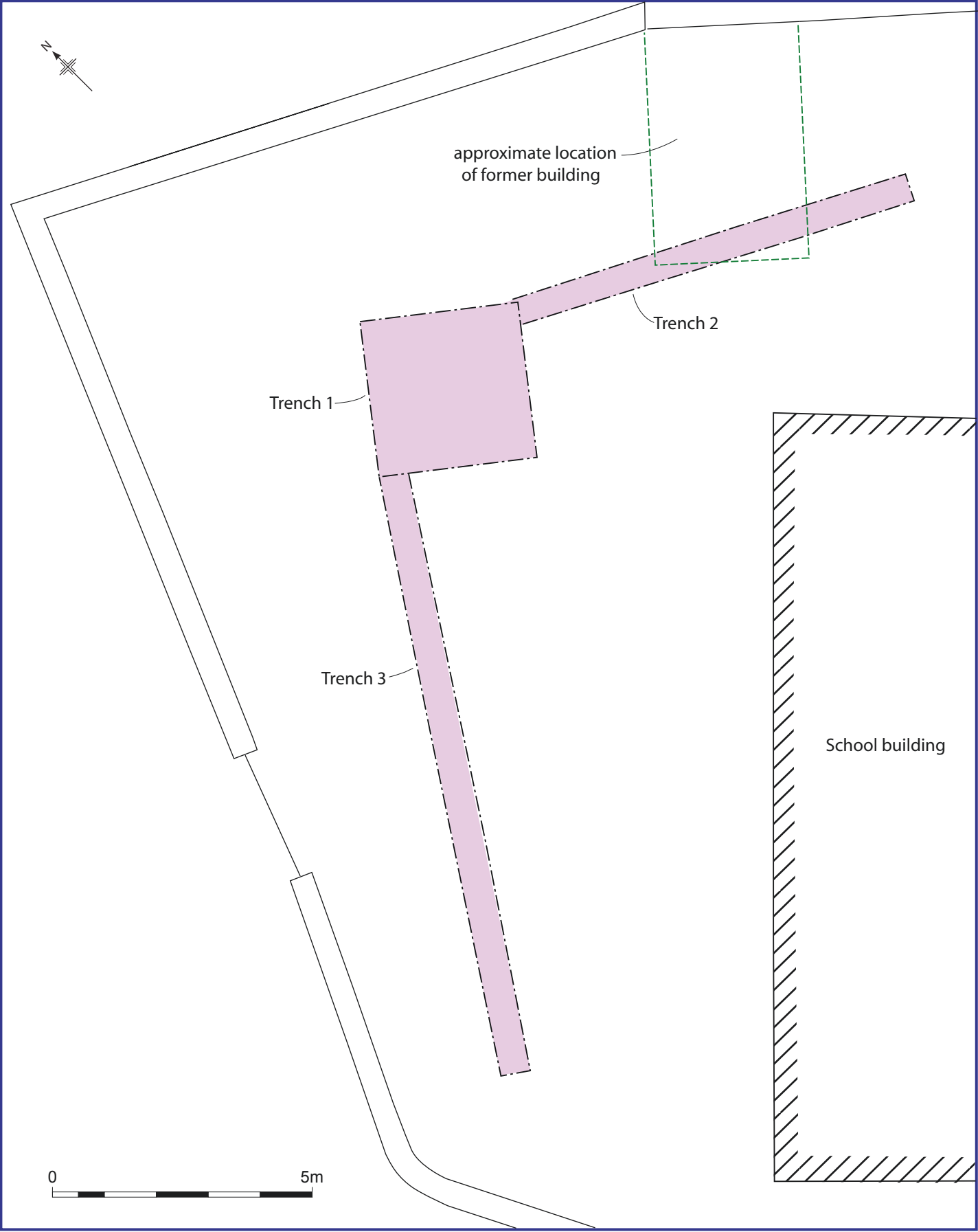


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*Location of the site and SMR data*

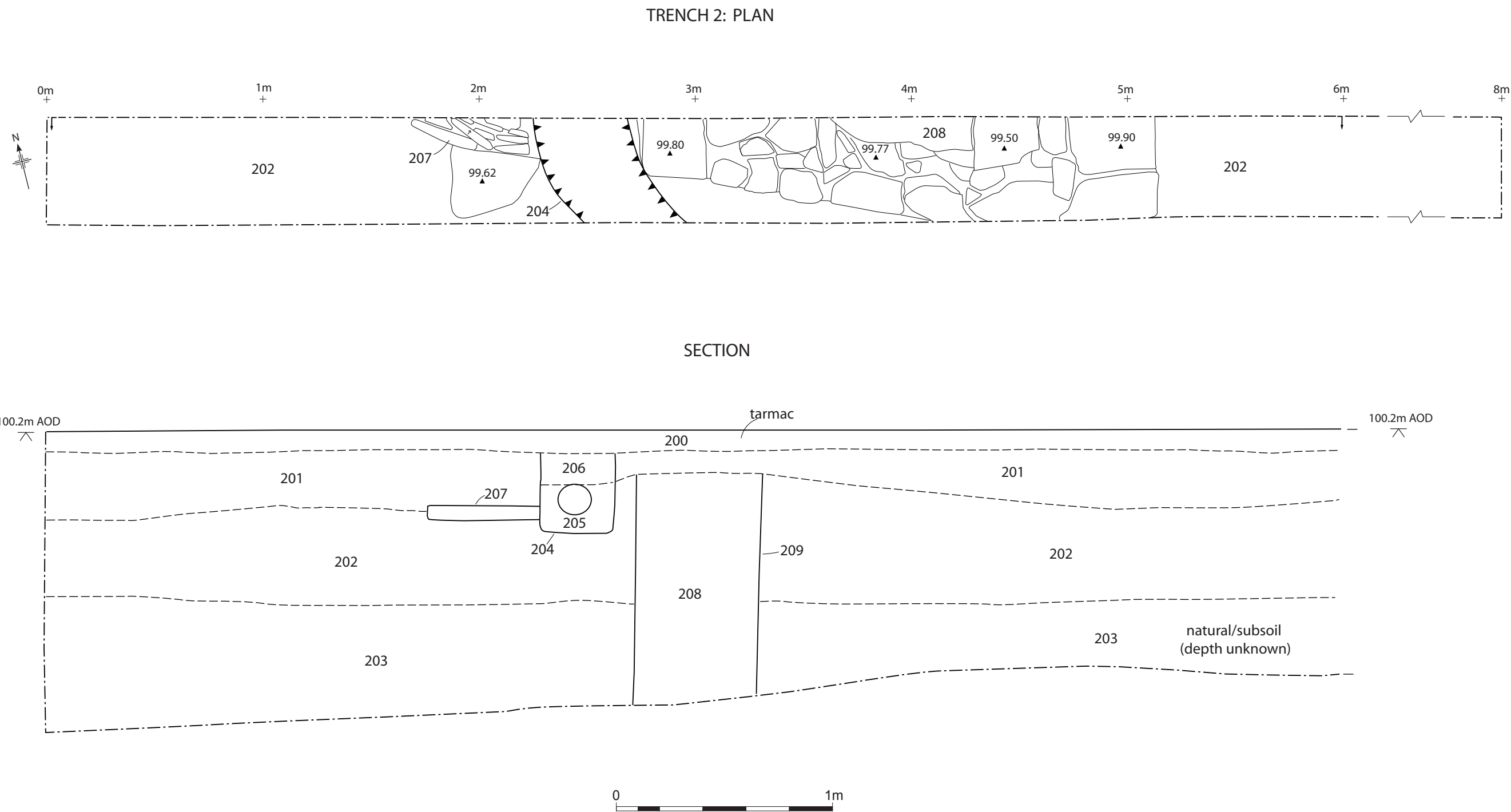
*Figure 1*





Trench location plan

Figure 2



*Trench 2 wall foundations: plan and section*

*Figure 3*

## Plates



*Plate 1: Trench 1 general shot of location during work in progress view south east*



*Plate 2: Trench 1 general section view east south east*

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*Plate 3: Trench 1 general section view west north west*

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*Plate 4: Trench 2 general shot 207 + 208 view eastsouthsouth*



*Plate 5: Trench 2 floor 207 view east south east*

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*Plate 6: Trench 2 wall 208 view north north east*



*Plate 7: Trench 2 wall 208 return into north baulk view north north east*



*Plate 8: Trench 2 wall 208 and wall scar to north view north north east*

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*Plate 9: Trench 3 general shot view north north east*



*Plate 10: Trench 3 deposits at south end view east*



## Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

### Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 3m Width: 3m Depth: 1.50m

Orientation: west north west – east south east

#### Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
101	Modern surface	Blackish grey tarmac; three layers. Same as 200 and 300.	0.00-0.10m
102	Foundation layer	Light cream/off-white limestone frags; crushed and compacted. Same as 201 and 301.	0.10-0.20m
103	Relict topsoil	Mid-light greyish-brown silty clay; moderately compact; occasional-moderate limestone frags and blocks; tile, animal bone. Same as 202 and 302.	0.20-0.70m
104	Subsoil	Mid greyish-brown silty clay, with frequent lighter & darker patches; moderately compact but friable; moderate-frequent limestone frags and blocks; pottery, animal bone. Same as 203.	0.50-1.50m
105	Natural	Light yellowish cream limestone.	1.50m +

### Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 8m Width: 0.38-0.45m Depth: 1.10-1.38m

Orientation: west north west – east south east

#### Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Modern surface	Blackish grey tarmac; three layers. Same as 101 and 300.	0.00-0.10m
201	Foundation layer	Light cream/off-white limestone; large angular blocks, smaller angular frags, set in dark brown silty clay; compacted. Same as 102 and 301.	0.10-0.34m
202	Relict topsoil	Dark brown silty clay; moderately compact; cohesive; frequent small angular limestone frags, occasional-moderate small charcoal flecks and ash lenses. Same as 103 and 302.	c 0.30-0.90m
203	Subsoil/natural	Light yellowish cream limestone; upper levels fragmented with orange/brown silty clay. Same as 104.	c 0.80m +
204	Drainage trench	Curvilinear cut; aligned approx north-south; vertical sides with a flat base; 0.34m wide; filled by 205 & 206; cuts 203 & 207?; sealed by 200.	0.10-0.47m
205	Fill	Small angular light cream/fawn limestone frags around service pipe; lower fill of 204; below 206.	0.24-0.47m
206	Fill	Concrete; upper fill of 204; seals 205.	0.10-0.24m

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Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
207	Floor	Medium elongated & rounded cobbles; 0.50m by 0.14m area; to west of foundation & butting 208?; continuing into north trench baulk; sealed by 201; bedded on 202; cut by 204.	0.34-0.41m
208	Wall	Square slabs and small angular blocks of limestone; unmortared; aligned west north west to east south east with return at west end under north baulk; within 208.	0.19-1.26m +
209	Foundation trench	Vertical sided; base not identified; filled by 208; cuts 202, 203 and 207; sealed by 201.	0.19-1.26m +

### Trench 3

Maximum dimensions:    Length: 11.80m    Width: 0.32-0.35m    Depth: 0.60m

Orientation:                    north north east – south south west

#### Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Modern surface	Blackish grey tarmac; three layers. Same as 101 and 200.	0.00-0.10m
301	Foundation layer	Light cream/off-white limestone; large angular blocks, smaller angular frags, set in dark brown silty clay; compacted. Same as 102 and 201.	0.10-0.25m
302	Relict topsoil	Dark brown silty clay; moderately compact; cohesive; frequent small angular limestone frags, occasional-moderate small charcoal flecks and ash lenses. Same as 103 and 202.	c 0.35m +

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## **Appendix 2   Technical information**

### **The archive**

The archive consists of:

1	Fieldwork progress records AS2
1	Photographic records AS3
63	Digital photographs
10	Abbreviated context records AS40
1	Trench record sheets AS41
1	Drawing number catalogues AS4
5	Scale drawings
1	Box of finds
1	Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

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

Tel. Cheltenham (01242) 237431

Fax Cheltenham (01242) 262334

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