

Archaeological Investigations at Pershore Street, Birmingham



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Archaeological investigations at Pershore Street, Birmingham

Andrew Walsh

With a contribution by Rob Hedge

Summary

Archaeological investigations were undertaken at Pershore Street, Birmingham (NGR SO 0728 8630). The works were commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Thomas Vale Construction, in advance of redevelopment of the site. The works were undertaken as a condition placed on planning consent.

Archaeological investigations in the vicinity of the site had identified the presence of Dirty Brook, a post-medieval channel built to drain dirty water from the centre of Birmingham. The brook was first recorded in the mid-18th century and is illustrated on a number of historic maps.

The archaeological investigations confirmed the presence of Dirty Brook, surviving as a brick-lined channel. Although no evidence of such a brick channel was identified during the previous excavations, examination of an 1808 map indicates Dirty Brook must have been culverted to the south of the site. One piece of 19th century pottery was recovered from an upper fill in this channel.

The investigations also identified a possible earlier channel, filled by a yellowish sand with lenses of ash, gravels and silts. This may be an earlier course of the Dirty Brook before it was rebuilt in brick. The nature of the ashy lenses suggests the fill was post-medieval in date, although no datable material was recovered from this channel.

Under the channel deposits was an organic rich layer which pre-dated the development of the channel. The nature of the deposit is uncertain, although it was visible across all the excavation trenches as a uniform layer and does not appear to be associated with either of the channels. It may be related to marshy ground or possibly osier beds which were known to exist in the area in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

Archaeological investigations were undertaken at the site of a former ice rink off Pershore Street, Birmingham (NGR SO 0728 8630). The works were commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Thomas Vale Construction, in advance of redevelopment of the site. Planning consent for the redevelopment was granted (Ref 2014/09600/PA) subject to a condition requiring the implementation of an approved programme of archaeological works (Condition 1).

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for archaeological works was prepared by CgMs Consulting and approved by Ross Brazier, Birmingham City Council. The WSI noted that previous archaeological investigations undertaken to the north of the site had identified the survival of an historic watercourse known as the Dirty Brook and osier beds which were depicted on a map of 1808 (Figure 4). The map also illustrated the watercourse in the development site.

Geotechnical investigations across the site demonstrated the survival of a sequence of made ground deposits with no modern inclusions in only one part of the site (MLM 2015, Window Sample 06). This location was on the projected course of the Dirty Brook and it was considered that there was a potential for remains of the watercourse to survive beneath the foundations of the former ice rink.

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological excavation* (ClfA 2014). The event reference for this project, given by the Worcestershire Archaeology is P4735.

2 Aims

The aims of the investigations were to:

- confirm the location of and to determine the date, form and function of Pudding and Dirty Brooks;
- identify, sample and analyse environmental and industrial residues in the Pudding and Dirty Brooks which could provide information on the past environment and surrounding medieval and post-medieval industrial activity;
- identify, sample and analyse the osier pits and environmental and industrial residue in them;
- identify and examine any archaeological features predating the 18th century maps of the area including former water courses and environmental or industrial residues in them.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Andrew Walsh (BSc MSc ACIfA FSA Scot), who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2013 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004, assisted by Jamie Wilkins (BA). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc PG Cert MCIfA), Elizabeth Pearson (MSc ACIfA) contributed the environmental report. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA MSc).

3.2 Documentary research

An archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken by Wardell Armstrong (Wardell Armstrong 2015).

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

The WSI proposed that one 30m by 6m trench would be excavated in an area where geotechnical investigation had identified soils which potentially represented archaeological deposits on the

predicted course of Dirty Brook. The trench also had the potential to reveal features associated with former industrial activity, should they be present. However during the first phase of archaeological investigations removal of the concrete slab in this area revealed that the slab had been built on a complex of concrete ring beams each of which measured approximately 7m by 4m and 0.83m in depth. Subsequently machine excavation focussed on removing the material between the ring beams (Plate 1). Three of these areas between the concrete ring beams were excavated to natural deposits using a mechanical excavator (Trench 1A, 1B and 1C; Figure 2). No hand excavation of deposits was possible during the first phase of investigation due to the uncertain nature of the structural integrity of the concrete ring beam, the unstable deposits below the ring beam and the presence of contaminated deposits from a 19th and early 20th century metal works. The features and deposits were recorded without entering the trench. This part of the fieldwork was undertaken between the 12th and 14th January 2016.

Post-excavation analysis of the results indicated that a brick feature, initially thought to be part of a later metal works, was on the same alignment as the Dirty Brook. Subsequently it was agreed with Birmingham City Council that the area immediately to the south-east of the brick feature would be excavated as a second phase of investigation to examine whether this was the remains of the Dirty Brook. This area was machine excavated to a safe depth, and the section was hand cleaned and recorded (Figures 2 and 3). This part of the fieldwork was undertaken on the 28th January 2016.

3.4 Environmental archaeology methodology

Samples were taken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). A total of three samples (each of up to 50 litres), from two different deposits, were taken from the site. Due to the presence of heavy metals on the site, two of the samples were tested by Scientific Services, Worcestershire County Council, in order to establish whether they were safe to process. This testing identified 'significant amounts of mercury, lead and arsenic'. Scientific Services advised that further advice should be sought if further work on the soil was going to be undertaken. It was determined that the risk of processing the samples outweighed the potential archaeological information gain and no further analysis was taken. The results of this processing are included in Appendix 1.

3.5 Artefact methodology

Artefacts were recovered according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event a sherd of pottery, two fragments of CBM and a brick were recovered. Due to the levels of contamination on the site it is not anticipated that these will be archived.

3.6 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

Although it is recognised that environmental samples could not be processed due to high levels of contamination, the methods adopted have enabled the key deposits on the site to be characterised and allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The site is located in central Birmingham (NGR SO 0728 8630) and occupies an area of approximately 3200m². The site is bounded to the east by Dean Street, to the south by the Birmingham Wholesale Market, to the west by Pershore Street and to the north by a Travelodge and private car park. Historically the area would have gently sloped from north to south towards the River Rea. However the area had been subject to historic ground reduction and levelling.

A concrete floor slab extended across the entire site at 109.30m AOD, with Pershore Street lying at 110.98m AOD to 110.48m AOD along the boundary of the site. A basement occupies the eastern part of the site, which has an internal floor level of 105.17m AOD.

The underlying geology of the site is mapped as Bromsgrove Sandstone Formation (BGS 2016). Immediately south-east of the site Mercia Mudstone is recorded. Although superficial deposits are not recorded by the BGS, recent geotechnical investigations on the site have identified the natural as superficial deposits of sand and gravel associated with the Rea Valley. These were identified at a depth of approximately 1.6 to 2.0m below the top of the concrete slab (MLM 2015).

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) has been carried out by Wardell Armstrong (Wardell Armstrong 2014). The site lay on the agricultural hinterland of Birmingham during the medieval period, and was separated from the town by a watercourse which served two moats, the manorial moat which lay to the north-east of the site and the parsonage moat which lay to the north-west.

The manorial moat was fed by the Pudding Brook which carried clean water. It first appears on 18th century historic maps although probably dates to the medieval period. The Dirty Brook appears on Sheriff's Map of 1808, although it is first recorded in 1783. Dirty Brook carried water away from the town and Sheriff's map indicates that both brooks lay within the eastern half of the site. Despite flowing in opposite directions the two brooks lay side by side in the vicinity of the site. Sheriff's map also indicates that where they crossed under Bromsgrove Street (historically immediately south of the site) the two brooks also crossed each other, presumably in culverts (Figure 4).

Archaeological excavations to the north of the site at the Travelodge site in 2009 by ULAS (Kipling 2010; Figure 2) and at Dean House in 2003 (Martin and Ratkai 2005) revealed deposits probably associated with Dirty Brook. Possible osier pits were also identified at both sites.

4.2 Land-use

The site was formerly an ice rink which had been demolished. Prior to the commencement of the archaeological investigations a concrete floor slab extended across most of the site. The only remaining structure on the site was an electricity substation which lay on the eastern edge of the site, adjacent to Dean Street.

5 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figures 2 to 4. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 2 and details of the site archive are presented in Appendix 3.

5.1 Trench 1 (trench not accessed)

The earliest deposit identified was a light blueish or brownish grey gravelly clay natural deposit (103), visible at a depth of 1.8m below the top of the concrete slab (107.50m AOD; Plate 1 and 2). No evidence of any feature cut into the natural stratum was visible. It was overlain by a dark grey brown silty sand (102) which was visible throughout the trench. This deposit appeared poorly sorted and analysis of this this deposit when compared to the results of the excavation in Trench 2 suggest it was actually two layers (Plate 2; see section 5.2). The combined layers measured up to 0.65m thick with the top of the deposit lying at approximately 108.20m AOD. Two broken fragments of CBM were recovered and an environmental sample was taken.

Layer (102) was cut by three brick built features (106), (108), (112), a large possible pit visible only in section (110) and the cut for a 20th century concrete basement (104). Feature (106) appeared to represent the remains of a silted up brick lined culvert and, notably, it was located on the same alignment as the predicted course of Dirty Brook (Figures 3 and 4). This feature consisted of a pair of parallel brick walls which were constructed through deposit (103). The walls were approximately 1.25m apart (Plates 3 and 4), and the channel between the walls had been filled with alternating lenses of pale brown or orangey grey sand and dark brown silts (107). The wall on the north eastern side of the channel appeared deeper than the wall to the south west (Plate 4).

Walls (108) and (112) do not appear to correlate with any features visible on the available early historic maps and were probably features related to 19th or early 20th century metal works. Pit (110) was filled by rubble and mortar and was probably 20th century in date.

Features (106), (108), (112) and pit (110) were truncated by the ring beam (100) and modern overburden which was visible at a depth of up to 0.9m below the top of the concrete slab. The top of the concrete slab was at 109.30m AOD.

5.2 Trench 2 (trench accessed for recording)

The earliest deposit identified was the same light blueish or brownish grey gravelly clay natural identified in Trench 1 (103). This was overlaid by a firm slightly spongy brownish black silty layer (218), which measured 0.25m in depth and contained organic material. It was sampled for environmental remains but analysis of the deposit showed elevated levels of Lead (Appendix 1). Layer (218) was overlain by a firm dark grey brown sandy silt (217; Plate 5), which measured 0.35m in depth and was in turn overlain by a mid-grey brown sandy silt (216). Layers (216), (217) and (218) appear to correlate with layer (102) which was identified in Trench 1 (Plate 2).

Layer (216) was cut by feature (215) which was approximately 0.40m in depth and orientated south-east to north-west (Plate 6). It had a shallow U-shaped profile was filled by a greyish yellow sand, which contained lenses of ash, silts and gravel (214). A fragment of rotted out wood was also noted in section.

Feature (215) was cut by the brick lined channel recorded in Trench 1 as (106). On the north-eastern side it was formed by wall (206) and by wall (208) to the south-west (Figure 3; Plate 6). Wall (206) was approximately 0.4m deeper than wall (208), although there was no reason to suggest why this was the case. This variation in depth was also noted in Trench 1 (Plate 4). There was no evidence of a surviving arch between the two walls.

The primary fill of the channel was a firm dark grey brown slightly sandy silt (204) which measured 0.06m in depth. It was sampled for environmental remains but analysis of the deposit showed elevated levels of Lead, Mercury and Arsenic (Appendix 1). It was overlaid by a greyish yellow sand (203) that contained a number of lenses of dark brown sandy silt which were particularly prevalent towards the base of the deposit. This deposit was overlaid by a loose deposit of greyish black ash and cinder type material (202), which was only visible on the south-western side of the channel, suggesting it may have been a dumped deposit, possibly from above, rather than a waterborne layer. This deposit contained the only find recovered from Trench 2, a 19th century piece of banded ware. Sealing (202) was a final layer of greyish yellow sand (201), above which was a dump of brick, stone and ash which was probably the final infilling of the channel before the site was developed in the early 19th century.

On the north-west side of the brick channel was a sequence of layers (210), (211) and (212) of sandy silts.

5.3 Artefact analysis by Rob Hedge and Andrew Walsh

A single sherd of dipped earthenware with white and brown bands over a yellow base was recovered from (202). Although packaging to prevent contamination precluded a precise identification, it is thought to be a rim sherd from a fine, possibly 'London shape' bowl. These vessels were produced from around 1810 up to the early 20th century. A mid-19th century date is considered likely. Two pieces of undiagnostic CBM were also recovered from layer (102).

6 Synthesis

The archaeological investigations at Pershore Street confirmed the presence of Dirty Brook, surviving as a brick-lined channel. Although no evidence of such a brick channel was identified during the ULAS excavations in 2009 to the north of the present site, examination of Sherriff's map indicates that both Pudding Brook and Dirty Brook must have been culverted to the south of the site (Figure 4). The map not only shows them passing under the road to the south, but also crossing over each other as they passed under the road. This would only be possible if they were in a pair of closed culverts. It therefore seems likely that the brick lined channel identified during the works is the truncated remains of Dirty Brook, which was probably in an open brick-lined

channel as it passed through the gardens marked on Sherriff's map, before entering into a closed culvert to the south.

The investigations also identified a possible earlier channel, filled by a yellowish sand with lenses of ash, gravels and silts. This may be an earlier course of Dirty Brook before it was rebuilt in brick. The nature of the ashy lenses suggests it was post-medieval in date, although no datable material was recovered.

Deposit (218) was an organic rich layer which pre-dated the development of the channel. The nature of the deposit is uncertain, although it was visible across all the excavation trenches as a uniform layer (Plates 2 and 5) and does not appear to be related to either of the channels. This may be related to marshy ground or possibly osier beds which, from the historic mapping, were known to occupy the area in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

The environmental evidence collected from the site showed elevated levels of heavy metals, and the samples were not processed. It is interesting to note that the metal contamination from the 19th century metalworks permeated into the earlier deposits.

7 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology 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.

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8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project; Cathy Patrick and Phil Bethell for commissioning the project and their help and support throughout, and Matt Fisher (Thomas Vale), Darren Grainger (City Demolition) and Simon Farr (Envirotrat) for their help and advice onsite. Ross Brazier (Birmingham City Council) monitored the works.

9 Bibliography

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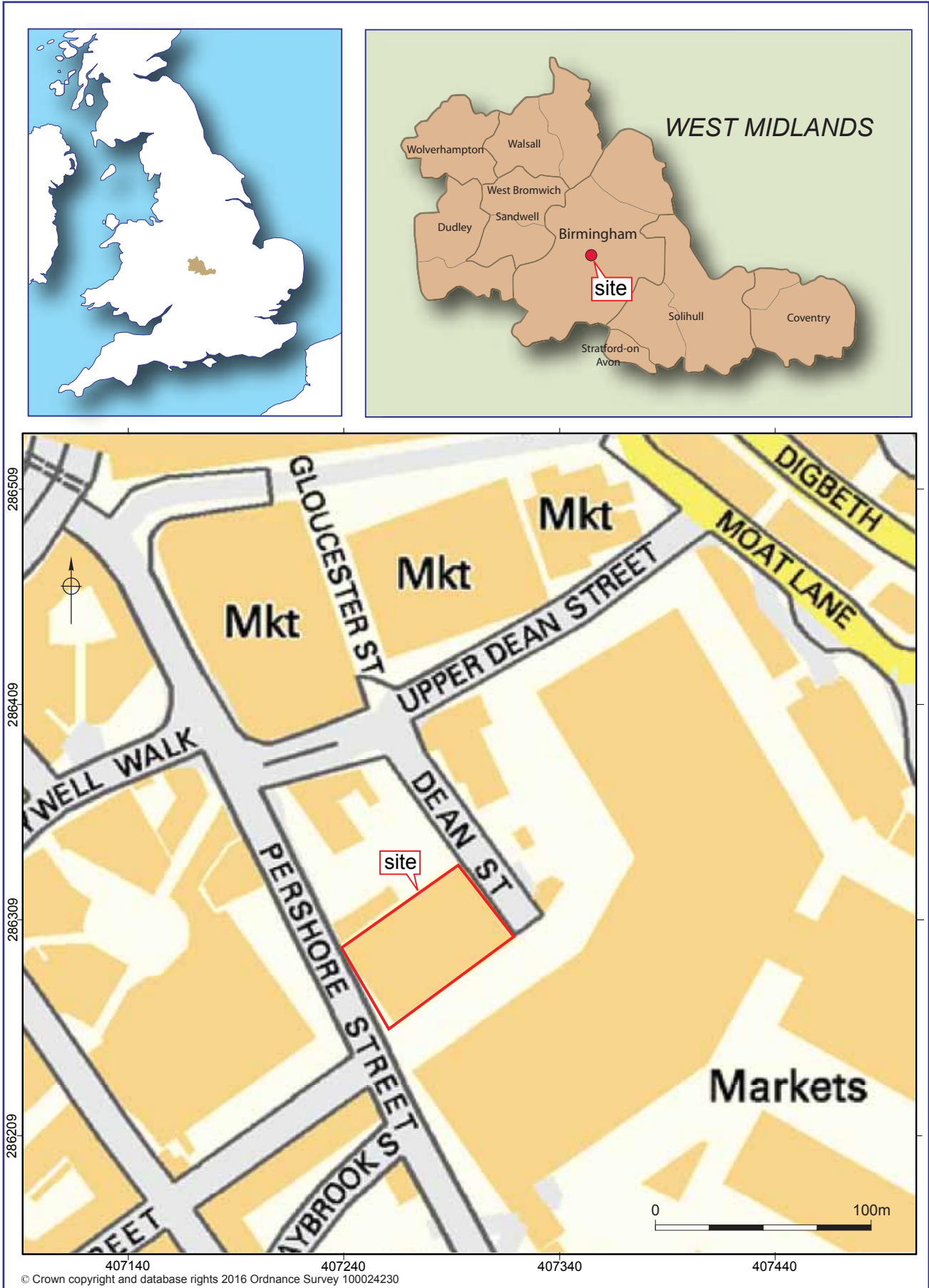
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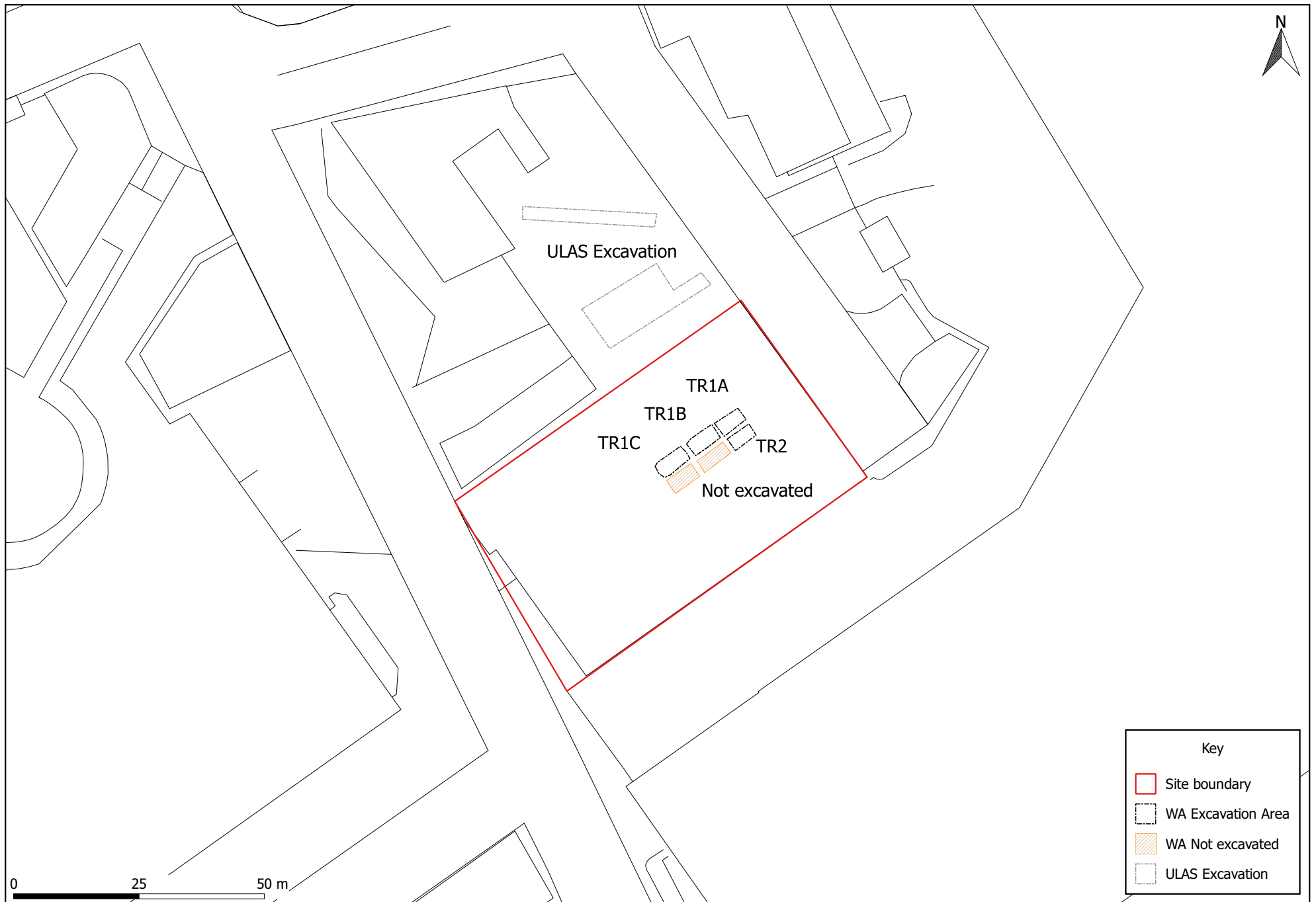
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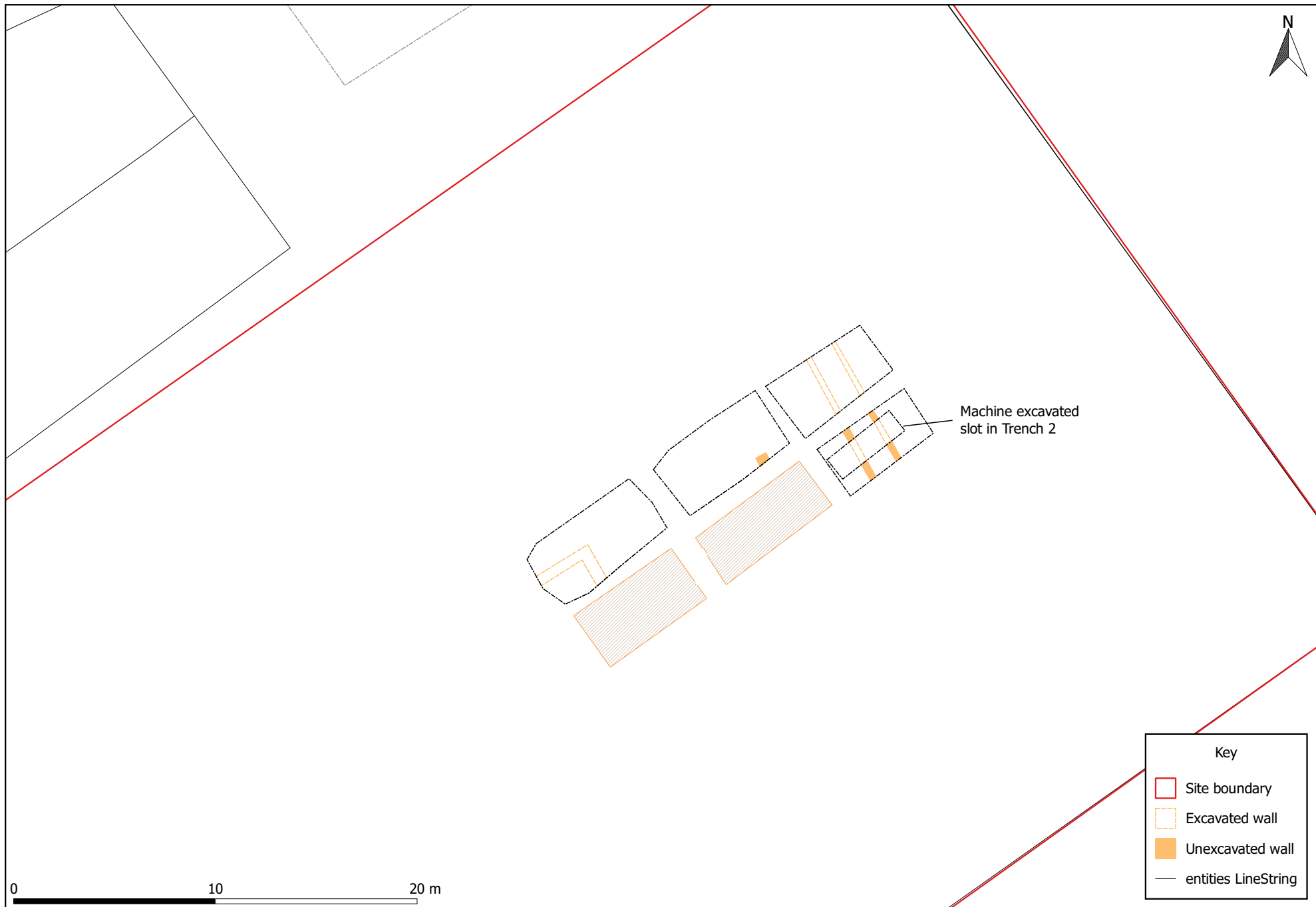
Figures



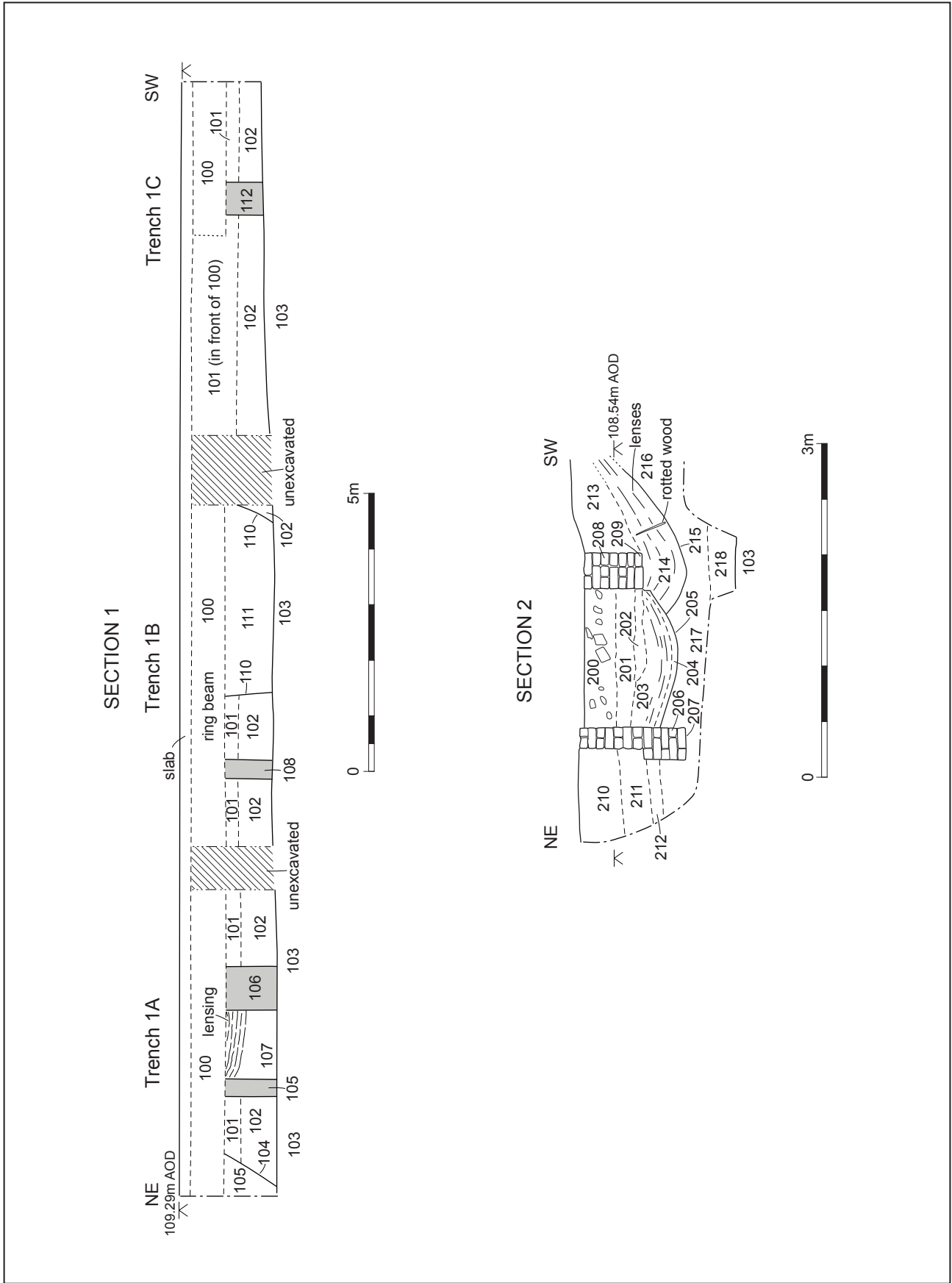
Location of the site

Figure 1









Sections

Figure 5

Plates



Plate 1. General shot of the excavation area, looking south-west



Plate 2. Light grey natural deposits (103) were visible in the base of the trench overlaid by a dark grey brown organic rich silty sand (102). The ring beam (100) is visible to the right, with overburden (101) visible above layer (102). Photo looking north-west



Plate 3. Structure (106) was formed of two parallel brick walls. Between the walls evidence of silting up was clearly visible (107). Photo looking south-east.



Plate 4. In the opposite section the silting (107) in Structure (106) was less clear although similar deposits were visible. Here the structure was less truncated, and the variation in depth of the walls is visible. Photo looking north-west



Plate 5. In Trench 2 natural deposits (light grey) were overlaid by an organic rich black silty layer (218), which was overlaid by dark grey brown sandy silt (217). The orangey yellow deposits above are possible channel fill (214). Photo looking south-east



Plate 6. General shot of Trench 2 showing the brick lined channel, and the possible earlier sandy filled channel (215) below the wall to the right.

Appendix 1 Results of the analysis of the environmental samples

For the attention of: Tom Rogers
Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology
The Hive
Sawmill Walk, The Butts
Worcester
WR1 3PD

Date of report: 12/02/2016
Our reference: CEO16/20034
Sample received 01/02/2016

Report on the analysis of sample:

SAMPLE 2 Soil from base fill of channel

Information supplied:

Method	Result Name	Test Value	Units
* WMISC	Miscellaneous investigation	Complete, see results below.	

Comments:

The air dried sample was analysed for contaminant metal content by ICP-OES, the results are given below:

Total Mercury 41 mg/kg
Total Arsenic 27 mg/kg
Total Lead 945 mg/kg
Total Cadmium less than 2.5 mg/kg

Signed: 

Donna Hanks, Team Leader

Report ID: 1620034-1 Page: 1 of 1

N.B. The sample and associated packaging will be destroyed one month after the date of report unless notification is received in writing or by email or contractual arrangements apply.

For the attention of: Tom Rogers
Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology
The Hive
Sawmill Walk, The Butts
Worcester
WR1 3PD

Date of report: 12/02/2016
Our reference: CEO16/20035
Sample received 01/02/2016

Report on the analysis of sample:

SAMPLE 3 Soil from Oiser bed

Information supplied: P4732

Method	Result Name	Test Value	Units
* WMISC	Miscellaneous investigation	Complete, see results below.	

Comments:

The air dried sample was analysed for contaminant metal content by ICP-OES, the results are given below:

Total Mercury less than 2.5 mg/kg
Total Arsenic 2.3 mg/kg
Total Lead 55.2 mg/kg
Total Cadmium less than 2.5 mg/kg

Signed:



Donna Hanks, Team Leader

Report ID: 1620035-1 Page: 1 of 1

N.B. The sample and associated packaging will be destroyed one month after the date of report unless notification is received in writing or by email or contractual arrangements apply.

Appendix 2 Context descriptions

Trench 1

Length: 20m

Width: 3.4m

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
100	Layer	Layer	Concrete	0.83	Concrete ring beam and broken remains of slabs
101	Layer	Layer	dark brown silt	0.3-0.8	Silt, rubble, sand and
102	Layer	Layer	Loose dark greyish brown silty sand	0.5m	Remains of possible osier beds of marshy ground
103	Natural	Layer	Firm light brownish grey clay		Natural
104	Wall	Cut		1.1	Cut of modern cellar
105	Wall	Fill	Loose brownish grey silty sand	1.1	Backfill of cut to cellar to NE: Possibly same as 101
106	Wall	Structure		0.9 visible	NW-SE aligned brick built culvert- could be part of Pudding Brook, or later Victorian development
107	Layer	Layer	light orangey grey silty	0.9	Silting/ infill of culvert
108	Wall	Structure		0.88	Brick wall or small structure, only visible TR1B NE section
109	Layer	Layer	Loose light brown sand		Irregular sandy layer visible between 101-2. Relationship with brick structure unestablished, probably later
110	Pit	Cut		0.9	Cut of large feature/ pit?
111	Pit	Fill	Loose silt	0.9	Mixed ash, mortar, cbm and silt.
112	Wall	Structure		0.58	Brick footing or cellar. Presumably corner or end of building
113	Wall	Structure	Firm pinky red sandy clay		Footing for brick wall

Trench 2

Length: 5m

Width: 2.8m

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
200	Wall	Fill	Loose mid grey silty sand	0.3	Loose rubble infill in top of brick lined channel
201	Gully	Fill	Loose greyish yellow sand	0.18	Final silting event in brick channel. Identical to upper part of 203
203	Gully	Fill	Loose greyish yellow	0.36	Fill of channel. U shaped profile with lenses of silty material towards base
204	Gully	Fill	Firm dark greyish brown sandy silt	0.06	Primary fill of brick lined channel formed by 206 and 208
205	Gully	Cut		0.84	Cut forming base of channel (Dirty Brook). Presumably related to channel wall cuts 207 and 209. Possibly waterworn
206	Wall	Structure		0.96	NE brick wall of Dirty Brook channel
207	Wall	Cut			Cut for wall 206
208	Wall	Structure		0.52	SW brick wall of Dirty Brook channel
209	Wall	Cut			Cut for brick wall 208
210	Layer	Layer	Loose mid greyish brown silty sand	0.4	Loose soil deposit of unclear origin. Possibly same as 213
211	Layer	Layer	Friable dark greyish brown sandy silt	0.25	Soil deposit, unclear origin
212	Layer	Layer	Loose orangey yellow sand	0.12	Possibly related to pre-brick lined Dirty Brook channel. Could also be
213	Layer	Layer	Loose mid greyish brown silty sand	0.44	Unclear origin
214	Gully	Fill	Loose greyish yellow sand	0.39	Fill of possible earlier channel of Dirty Brook
215	Gully	Cut		0.39	Cut of possible earlier version of Dirty Brook channel
216	Layer	Layer		0.3	SW end of trench, unclear function or origin, possibly garden/agricultural soil
217	Layer	Layer	Firm dark greyish brown	0.4	Deposit under Dirty Brook. Unclear function or date. Agricultural soil?

Appendix 3 Technical information

The archive (site code: P4735)

The archive consists of:

- 31 Context records AS1
- 2 Field progress reports AS2
- 4 Photographic records AS3
- 1 Colour transparency film
- 1 Black and white photographic films
- 102 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 2 Scale drawings AS34
- 1 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
Chamberlain Square
Birmingham
B3 3DH

Tel: 0121 3032834
